THE ART OF TEACHING



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JOSHUA FITCH

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BY THE LATE

SIR JOSHUA FITCH

A NEW EDITION

EDITED BY REV. FRANK JOHNSON

AUTHOR OF 'FAITH AND VISION'; EDITOR OF 'BIBLE TEACHING BY MODERN METHODS.'

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EDITORIAL PREFACE

THE following lectures were given by the late Sir Joshua Fitch over forty years ago in connection with the Sunday School Union classes for teachers. So far back as this, and even earlier, teacher-training was recognized by the Union to be the supreme need of the Sunday school, and it is a tribute to the leaders of that day that their pioneer efforts have flowered so abundantly, and that so much of the counsel then given and published has proved of permanent worth.

None who knew anything of Sir Joshua Fitch will be surprised to find any serious utterance of his on religious education in this category. He was a great educationist, adding to theoretical knowledge and wide experience of teaching in elementary schools a practical acquaintance with Sunday school work. Further, the charm of his personality communicated itself to his words. There is nothing arid and pedantic about these lectures. They are popular in the best sense of the term—sound in principle, wide in outlook, simple and picturesque in treatment. More than this, the tone and standpoint are those of a man taking the spiritual view of life. No divorce will

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be found here between education and religion. Sir Joshua Fitch was at one with all the great teachers in assuming that true education must be fashioned by the only things that matter—the Will of God, and men's relation to Him. Nor was this conviction limited to Sunday schools. It moulded all his teaching on educational aims and methods. Of course dogmatic theology is not to be identified with religion; what was meant, and what is still meant, by those who occupy the same standpoint, is that character speaks louder than words. Every school should possess a sunny moral climate in which Christian graces will develop unconsciously and almost without observation.

It is true that to some extent these lectures are coloured by the light of the time when they were delivered. Sunday school teachers as a class are now better educated, and the best Sunday schools are now more scientifically organized. Grading, for example, is common, and it is becoming more difficult to address teachers *en masse*. Lecturers to-day on method wish to know whether they are speaking to teachers of Senior classes, to Intermediate class teachers, or to those in charge of Primary classes. The bane of Adultism is also better understood. Yet, in the main, the conditions of forty years ago still exist, and the counsels here given are as applicable to-day as when they were first offered. The fact does more than suggest the changelessness of Sunday school conditions. It rather shows that the conditions of the educational problem remain permanent, and that the great governing principles of teaching have the invariableness of truth. It may also be

added that the timeliness of lectures delivered more than a generation ago shows the mastery of his subject possessed by the lecturer.

Save for a few unimportant omissions and modifications, the lectures are reprinted as they were delivered, the editor's work being limited to the sub-divisions and display of the text. It has been thought helpful to append to the Lecture on Memory Ruskin's tribute to the value of memorizing hymns, and the passages of Scripture taught to him by his mother.

FRANK JOHNSON.

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THE ART OF TEACHING

THE ART OF SECURING ATTENTION

By attention, I mean fixity of thought—the concentration of the whole mind upon one subject at a time—that effort of will by which we are enabled to follow what we hear or read, without wandering, without weariness, and without losing any particle of the meaning intended to be conveyed.

I do not doubt that to many of you the thought occurs, "This, indeed, is the one thing which I most want. If I could only secure attention, what an admirable teacher I should be! How happy I should be in my work! How much success and usefulness would follow my efforts!" Now this is a very natural reflection; but it will be my object to prove to you that it is not a very sound one; and that attention must not be looked upon as the *condition* of our being good teachers; but rather as the *result* of our being so.

The Difficulty and Importance of Securing Attention.

Let us first of all acknowledge to ourselves, that attention, such as we want to get from children, is

a very hard thing to give. You and I, even when we have the strongest sense of duty urging us to attend to a subject, often find that it is next to impossible to chain our thoughts resolutely down to it. The memory of yesterday's business, the prospect of to-morrow's pleasure, will intrude upon us in spite of all our efforts. We constantly lose the thread of argument, even in a book that interests us; the eye glances down the page, but the thoughts do not follow it, and we are compelled to go back again, and make a renewed effort to keep our wayward minds in harness. You know how often this is true; whether you listen to a sermon or a lecture, or read a book. It is true even when you most desire to resist the temptation. How much more is the difficulty likely to be felt by little children, who are constitutionally more restless than we are, whose normal natures are but partially developed, and who have at present no strong sense of duty to chide them into silence, or awe them into attention.

And let us confess to ourselves, also, that we are accustomed to make very heavy demands upon a child's faculty of attention, especially on Sunday. And all the day's engagements, we must remember, relate to a subject which, although of the deepest importance, is not naturally felt to be so in early youth. Until it pleases God to impart to a little child, either through the instrumentality of wise teaching or otherwise, an appetite for sacred truths, he has no natural curiosity about them. He *is* naturally very inquisitive about the things that immediately surround him: he is curious to learn about the sun, and the moon, and the stars; about

distant countries; about the manners of foreigners; about birds and beasts and fishes; nay, even, about machines and many other human inventions: but about the nature of God, and about man's relation to Him, and the great truths of revealed religion, you know that there is rarely any strong curiosity in a child's mind. You do not find the appetite for such knowledge as this already existing there. You have to create it; and until you have created it, your scholar cannot give you the fixed and earnest attention you want, without an effort which is positively painful to him.

I think it important at the outset that we should be aware of these two simple facts: first, that *fixed attention is a hard thing for anybody to give;* and second, that *fixed attention to religious subjects is especially a hard thing for children to give.*

When we have fairly taken these facts into account, we shall be better prepared to avail ourselves of any counsel which may enable us to secure attention. For however hard it may be to gain attention we *must* get it, if we are to do any good at all in a Sunday school. It is of no use there to tell children things which go no deeper than the surface of their minds, and which will be swept away to make room for the first trifling matter which claims admission there. If children are really to be the better for what we teach, if the truths which we love so well are really to go deep into their consciences, and become the guiding principles of their lives, it is no half-hearted, languid attention, which will serve our purpose. We are not dealing with facts which will bear to be received and then forgotten; but with truths,

which if they have significance at all, have an eternal significance; and if they are to have any practical value to a child at all, must not only be received by his understanding, but lodged securely in his memory, and made to tell upon the formation of his character for this world and the next.

How not to secure Attention.

You will not get attention by claiming it, by demanding it as a right, or by entreating it as a favour; by urging upon your pupils the importance of the subject, the sacredness of the day, the kindness of their teachers, or the great and solemn character of the truths you have to impart. All these are very legitimate arguments to use to older Christians. You and I, we may hope, feel their force. The sense of these things keeps us thoughtful and silent many a time, perhaps, when we are hearing a dull or unintelligible address. We feel we *ought* to be attentive, and so we make an effort to be so. George Herbert argues that if the preacher's discourse entirely lacks interest, we must consider that

> "God takes a text, and preacheth patience."

Now, this is a very valid argument to us, no doubt, but it is no argument to a child.

The Secret of Attention is Interest.

Nothing, in the long run (except fear, which I know you would feel to be a very unsatisfactory motive) can keep a child's attention fixed, but a sense of real interest in the thing you are saying. It is necessary that he should feel that the subject

claims attention for itself, not that you are claiming attention *for* the subject. Depend upon it, that attention got by threats, by authority, or even by promises, or indeed by any external means whatever, is not a genuine or effective thing. The true attention, such as alone can serve the purpose of a Sunday school teacher, must always be founded on the fact you have got something to say which is worth a child's hearing, and that you can say it in such a manner that he shall feel it to be worth his hearing.

Interest depends on Preparation.

And, of course, the first condition to be fulfilled, in order to secure this, is, that the teacher's own mind shall be accurately and abundantly prepared on the subject which he has to teach. It seems a trite thing to say to teachers that they should prepare their lessons. But I doubt whether many of us see the importance of preparation in its true light. Observe, I said a teacher should be *accurately* prepared. By this, I mean that there should be no vagueness, or indistinctness in his mind, about what he is going to teach. He should not rely on a general impression that he comprehends the subject. He must have details—facts which he knows how to state with exactness—and a degree of nicety and precision about his knowledge far greater than he can ever hope to impart to the children. Again, I said he should be *abundantly* prepared. This means that he should store his mind beforehand, not merely with what he means to impart, but with a great deal more. He does not know what topic may grow out of the lesson:

he cannot tell what questions the children may ask, nor what illustrations he may find most effective. So he should provide himself at all points. He should look *at* the lesson and *into* the lesson, and *all round* the lesson, before he gives it; gathering together, in his mind, all that can possibly throw light upon it, and become useful in his teaching.

Abundant Preparation is essential.

There is another reason for attaching great importance to *abundant* preparation. No man can ever teach all he knows on any subject. I doubt, indeed, whether he can teach half of what he knows. If you would be a good teacher, therefore, up to a certain limit, you yourself should have gone far beyond that limit. We must look at any fact we want to teach from very different, and perhaps distant points of view in order to comprehend its true relation to other facts. If any teacher just gets up a lesson from printed notes, and is only barely provided with the knowledge actually required for his class, he is sure to fail, both in securing attention, and in getting the subject understood. Children will always carry away with them far less than you bring. Make up your mind at once to the fact, that a large discount, or percentage of even a successful lesson, is always lost in the very act of communicating it. Therefore, if you wish children to receive a given amount of instruction, you must be provided with a great deal more. I always notice when a man is teaching, that the moment he gets within sight of the horizon, and feels that he is approaching the limits of his

own knowledge, he falters; he becomes embarrassed; he loses confidence in himself: the children soon detect his weakness, and the lesson loses interest immediately. Now the practical inference from this:—Get all the subsidiary and illustrative information you can possibly accumulate about your lesson, before you give it. Anecdotes, definitions of hard words, illustrations of Eastern life, verses of poetry, parallel texts and allusions, may or may not all be needed in the lesson; but, at any rate, they certainly *will* be needed by yourself, to give due life and vigour to your teaching, and to make you feel confidence in your own resources.

The Value of Observation.

But the preparation required cannot all be obtained from books. Valuable as book knowledge is, it is not the only knowledge, and it is certainly not all a Sunday school teacher wants. His preparation must be going on in the world as well as in his study. He must watch the incidents of every day, and see what use he can make of them in his class. If he has an open eye, and that "loving heart," which a great writer has called the beginning of all knowledge, he will be able to learn a great deal, by observation, respecting the nature of childhood, its dangers, its wants, and the peculiar teaching which is best suited for it. He will constantly be watching incidents and events, and treasuring up as much of them as can be brought to bear upon his scholars, or is likely to convey instruction to them. I am afraid some of us do not think enough of this. Why, there is

not a circumstance that happens to any one of us, not an incident in our daily life, public or private, not a success or a failure, a misfortune or a blessing, which has not its own special significance, and is not meant to teach us some useful lesson. If we only had eyes to see and hearts to receive it, we should perceive that the history of each day's experience, even of the humblest of us—every one of the shifting phenomena of our daily life—illustrates some great moral and spiritual truth which underlies it, and is meant to be recognized and understood by us. Do we husband the experience of every day? Do we watch the lessons it teaches, the warnings that it brings, and do we try to bring it to bear upon our Sunday teaching? If we do not, we lose a great opportunity of usefulness, and throw away one of the main securities for obtaining attention.

The Bookish and Unpractical Lesson will fail.

For, after all, one of the first requisites in good teaching is, that it shall address itself to the actual experience and necessities of the learner, and not to any imaginary experience or necessities. We cannot fulfil this condition unless we make it our business to know what are the real dangers and temptations, the weaknesses and the want of the children whom we have to teach. I took a little child to church with me the other day; and her remark, on coming out, was, "I don't understand that preacher, he doesn't talk like gentlemen in rooms." Now, I do not suppose that public services can ever, in the nature of things, be otherwise than strange and unintelligible to children;

but I am sure that the more Sunday school teachers talk like "gentlemen in rooms," the better. If there is anything unfamiliar, or artificial, or sermonizing in your language; if the child detects anything that sounds like falsetto in your tone; if your illustrations are bookish and unpractical; if the virtues and the vices you talk about are not the actual virtues which it is possible for them to practise, and the actual vices into which they are likely to fall; if, in any way, you shoot above their heads, or betray a want of familiarity with the real lives which children lead,—your class will cease to feel any interest in what you say.

We may now safely conclude, I think, that ample and accurate knowledge of the subject, and skill in applying it to the case of children, will, in every case, give a Sunday school teacher a right to be heard, and will enable him, therefore, without difficulty to gain the ear of his class.

Mechanical Devices for securing Attention.

But suppose attention is once gained in this way, we still have to inquire how it may be kept up. First, let me mention one or two merely mechanical devices for maintaining attention. Of course these are not the highest, but they are sometimes useful, nevertheless. For instance, children need *change of posture.* The restlessness which we often complain of in children, is not a fault, it is a constitutional necessity. It is positively painful to them to remain in one attitude long. We ought to be aware of this; and, occa-

1. Change of posture.

sionally, when attention seems to flag, let the whole class stand for a short time, or go through some simple exercise which requires movement. You will often find that in this way your class will be refreshed. When the body has had its lawful claims recognized, the mind will be more at leisure to devote itself to the lessons; the sense of weariness will disappear, and the work of teaching proceed with more cheerfulness. I have often seen teachers and children remain sitting during the whole of a long summer afternoon, and the teacher wondering at the listlessness of his class. But I see nothing to wonder at. Indeed, for my part, I know I cannot teach with vigour and spirit for long together, while I am sitting down; and it is hard to expect children to be better in this respect than myself. Dulness and lassitude begin to creep over the mind; and I confess I like to see a teacher stand up, now and then, and throw a little fire and life into his lesson, as well as occasionally cause his scholars to stand up too.

2. Questioning each in turn.

In a small class, also, attention may very often be sustained by *causing the children to answer strictly in turns;* by making them take places, and by recording the number of times the same boy gets to the top. The little emulation promoted by this plan is favourable to mental activity, and often prevents a lesson from becoming dull. It requires to be rather skilfully managed, and needs a good disciplinarian to conduct it; but I have seen the plan used with very great success, and excite great interest on the part of the children. It is particularly useful in testing the result of your teaching

by questions at the end of each division of the subject, as it applies the test with perfect fairness and uniformity to every child in the class.

What is called *simultaneous reading* may also prove a great help in maintaining the interest and attention, especially of a younger class. Of course it must not be practised in a crowded school-room, when the noise would disturb other classes; unless, indeed, you have tutored your class to read in a quiet and subdued tone (which is a great point in education, and quite worth taking some trouble to obtain). But, if it can be adopted, the plan will occasionally relieve a lesson very much. It is always interesting to children to do something in concert; and if the teacher has a sharp eye, and a quick ear, he can easily secure that every child shall be thoroughly wakeful and attentive. The exercise may often be well varied in this way. The teacher reads a passage slowly, and with correct tone and emphasis alone; he then reads it a second time, the class joining with him, and reading in unison. He then asks them to be silent, and to keep their eyes fixed on the book while he reads, and to supply any word which he leaves out. Then he reads the passage, pausing frequently, and omitting a word to be supplied by the children. Lastly, he calls upon one and another separately to read the same passage. The plan of elliptical reading is one of the best I know to stimulate watchfulness and fixed attention on the part of the children. I have seen fifty little ones together, their eyes fixed intently on the book, all eager to pronounce the word omitted by the teacher at exactly the right moment.

3. Simultaneous reading.

There is an indirect method of questioning, too, very familiar to you all, which is founded on the same principle, and may serve a useful purpose in sustaining attention. I mean the use of *ellipses*, as they are called. The teacher, instead of finishing the sentence himself, pauses suddenly, and requires the children to finish it for him. Good teachers, especially those of infant schools, have long been accustomed to use this method, and have found it very efficacious. Only it must be remembered that it is a device which wants very skilful management. The word left out of the sentence which the children are expected to supply should be one which they ought to remember, and it should also, in every case, be a definite word. There should be no vagueness in the teacher's own mind, as to what he expects; there should be one way, and only one way, in which the sentence can be properly finished. The word omitted, moreover, should be one which it requires a little effort to recollect; it should not be the mere echo of the word just uttered. And it is just as necessary in the use of ellipses, as in the practice of questioning, to take care that there is no guessing, and no merely mechanical utterance of a word to which the child attaches no meaning. The elliptical method is an admirable device for keeping up the attention, especially of little children; but it can never be made a substitute for good questioning, for the simple reason that it only demands a single word, and can never enable you to be sure that the learner understands the whole sentence, of which the word forms a part. (See also page 88.)

4. The use of ellipses.

Again: one of the greatest safeguards for the attention of the class is the cultivation on the teacher's part of *quickness of eye and ear.* It is surprising sometimes to see teachers addressing themselves to one part of their class, and apparently unconscious that another part is listless and uninterested. They seem incapable of taking in the whole class at one glance. Their eyes move slowly, and they either do not see the disorder and trifling which lurk in the corner of their class, or they do not care to notice what it would give them some little trouble to remedy. A person of this kind will never keep up attention, nor prove a successful teacher, however well he may be provided with knowledge, and however anxious he may be to do good.

5. Quickness of eye and ear.

What every good teacher greatly needs, is a quick eye, and a comprehensive glance, which will take in the whole class at one view, or travel instantly from one part of it to the other. He should be able to detect the first rising of disorder and the first symptom of weariness in an instant, and to apply a remedy to it the next instant. It is from want of promptitude in noticing the little beginnings of inattention that classes so often get disorderly and tired. I recommend every one who wants to be a good teacher, therefore, to cultivate in himself the habit of sharpness and watchfulness. He should so train himself, that he shall become peculiarly sensitive about the little signs of inattention. It ought to make him uncomfortable to see one child's eye averted, or one proof, however small, that the thoughts of the class are straying from the

subject. The surest way to increase inattention is to seem unconscious of it, or to allow it to pass unnoticed.

I would have every teacher ask himself these questions: "Can I *see* the whole of my class? Do I stand or sit so that the slightest movement or whisper on the part of any single child will be apparent to me in a moment? Do the children all know that, whatever happens, I am sure to notice it? Do I allow myself to remain at ease during inattention? Have I got used to it by long practice, and become reconciled to it, or does it pain me to discover even a slight proof of it? Do I, in short, make it a practice never to go on with my lesson until I have recovered attention?" Unless you can answer these questions satisfactorily, you will always be plagued with inattention. For, among the minor characteristics of a successful teacher, few things are so important as alacrity of movement; promptitude and readiness both in seeing and hearing; skill in finding out, at a moment's notice, who is the idlest boy in the class, and in giving him a question, or giving him a verse to read, or making him stand up at once, before his mind becomes thoroughly alienated from the subject, and before the contagion of his example has had time to spread among the rest. A sluggish, heavy, inactive-looking teacher, can never gain the sympathy of the children, or keep up their attention long.

I have called all these *mechanical methods* of sustaining attention, because no one of them has anything to do with the matter of teaching, or with the treatment of the subject; but they are simply

external and subordinate contrivances for keeping the attention of a class from flagging. Of course no one needs, especially in a class of elder children, to adopt all these methods at once, and the better a teacher is, the better able he will be to do without some of them ; but we all need to keep them in mind sometimes. And I want, before I pass on to the more important part of the subject, just to remind you that all I have said on this point is founded on two principles : first, that the nature of childhood, its physical weakness, above all, its restlessness and need for change should be fairly taken into account and provided for by a teacher, and not set down as faults, or frowned down by authority ; and, secondly, that every child under a teacher's care should always feel that there is something for him to do. Continual employment is the great antidote to inattention. I think, that if you will keep these principles in view, you will be induced to invent many expedients for keeping up the vivacity and interest of a class besides those which I have named.

The method of Review.

Closely allied to what I have called mechanical methods is one which, however, needs some intelligence to put it in operation. I mean the practice of *recapitulation*, by diligent and thorough interrogation, not only at the end of the whole lesson, but also at the end of each separate division of it. This is of great importance in sustaining the interest of a class. Children are not likely to take much pains in receiving and remembering a lesson unless they know that their memory is sure to be tested ; and that, however many facts or truths you

teach, you are sure to wish to hear of them again. Every lesson should be planned out in the teacher's own mind, so as to consist of two or three distinct portions. I do not mean that he should talk about "firstly, secondly, and thirdly," to his class, or make any needless display of the skeleton or framework of his lesson; but a clear logical division of the subject into two or three portions is indispensable to the teacher himself; and at the end of each of these, he should go over the ground thoroughly, and challenge the children to give him back all he has taught. When boys become habituated to this, they learn to expect it as a matter of course; and are therefore induced to prepare for it, by much closer attention than would otherwise seem necessary to them.

I always made it a practice, in my own class, at a Sunday school, not only to recapitulate the lesson just taught, but also to spend the first ten minutes of every Sunday afternoon in giving a few questions on the lesson of the preceding Sunday. I kept a record of those who answered best, and rewarded them by an extra mark or ticket. With elder boys, also, I always required the substance of last Sunday's lesson to be written down on paper, in the course of the week, and brought to me each Sunday. One consequence of this was, that some of the boys brought note books with them; and it is certain that far closer attention was paid to my teaching than before. Of course, this plan involves the necessity of some system and method, and of some little trouble too; for all the papers require to be taken home and read by the teacher. But of one thing we may be quite sure; no one of us, child or

man, ever takes pains to grasp a subject, or fasten it in our memories, unless we expect in some way to find a use for it hereafter. So, if we wish to get a real effort of attention from children, we must do it by leading them to expect that their knowledge will be asked for again; by showing them that when we have once taught a thing, we do not forget it, but are sure to return to it; it may be half an hour hence, or it may be a week hence, but at any rate certainly and systematically.

Pictorial power.

One of the most efficient means of kindling the interest and chaining the attention of children, is the power of using good and striking illustrations. The best teachers are always those who, in addition to a knowledge of their subject, and the other qualifications which are necessary, possess also what may be called *pictorial power*. By this I mean the power of describing scenes and incidents, so that they shall appear to a child's imagination as if they were really present to him. Now, we must always remember that the imagination is a very active faculty in a child. It is developed far earlier in the life of all of us than the judgment, and those reasoning powers which we are often prematurely anxious to cultivate. Every teacher, therefore, should know how to address himself to this faculty, and should be able to gratify that love of description which is so natural to a child. Now, how many of us are there, I should like to know, who can tell a story well, or who can so describe a thing which we have seen, that those who hear our description shall think they can almost see it too? Yet a man is never a perfect teacher until he can do this; and no

appeals to the reason and the conscience and the feelings of a child will be so effective as they might be unless we can also appeal to his imagination.

Need I remind you how constantly this is recognized in the Word of God; how continually the Bible writers, and especially the great Teacher himself, condescended to the weakness of man in this respect, and addressed their teachings not to the understanding directly, but indirectly, through the medium of the senses and the imagination. What else is the meaning of our Lord's parables? What else are those glowing Eastern metaphors, sparkling like rich gems over the whole surface of the Bible but helps to the comprehension of great truths—optical instruments, so to speak, through which our dim eyes might behold doctrines and principles and deep lessons, which otherwise they could not have perceived?

Now, it is almost unnecessary to say much as to the power of exciting attention which a teacher possesses who is able to use good illustrations. We all know what an advantage such a teacher has over others. We have all observed, when a scene is picturesquely described, or a striking illustration brought forward, or a story told, how the faces of the children have lighted up with interest, and their eyes have been fixed upon the speaker. But, perhaps, while we all acknowledge the attractiveness of pictorial teaching, we have not all duly considered its usefulness, nor the reasons which give it its peculiar force and value.

Let us look for a moment at an example or two. When we read in the Psalms the words, "The Lord God is a sun and shield," we know, and every child

knows, that the words are not literally true, but must be thought of a little before they can be understood. So we say to ourselves, "What does this mean? The sun is the great source of light and cheerfulness, and a shield is something with which soldiers defend themselves in battle. Therefore, this must mean that God's presence and favour make a man glad and happy, and at the same time shelter him from danger." Suppose all this has passed through our minds; we have got the knowledge of a great truth in a somewhat indirect way, it is true; but we are far more likely to be impressed by it, and to remember it, than if the literal fact had been conveyed to us in plain language. And why so? Because we have had a share in finding out the truth for ourselves; because the mind was not called upon passively to receive a truth in the form of direct statement; but to exert itself a little, first in interpreting a metaphor, and, secondly, in drawing a conclusion from it. We are always far more interested by what we have had a hand in winning for ourselves, than by what is merely communicated to us as a favour, or enforced on us by authority. Which of us has not a deeper feeling of the Saviour's tenderness and compassion, after reading the parable of the Good Shepherd, than we could ever have had otherwise? When we read, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe;" or, "As the mountains are about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people;" "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God:" or, when we come upon that glorious description in the Apocalypse of "a city

which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the Lord God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof," we are conscious that, over and above the value of the truths thus imparted, we receive a certain gratification from the form in which the truth is presented, and are pleased to have had something given us which we have been able to interpret for ourselves.

The law of indirection.

Consider again, in regard to the lessons which lie hid in allegories and stories, that we often receive them far more effectively into our minds for the very reason that they are indirect, and do not at first seem to apply to ourselves. If we obtrude our moral teaching too early, or if we begin by telling the children that we hope they will learn a useful lesson from what we are going to say, children fancy that we are preaching, and are, perhaps, indisposed to listen. But if we take care that the religious truth, or the rule of conduct, which we wish to enforce, seems spontaneously to grow out of the lesson, and keeps its place as an inference to be gathered from the story we are telling, it is far more likely to be efficacious.

When Nathan was commissioned to reprove David, you know that if he had gone at once, and taxed him with the offence, and said, "You have committed a great sin, and I am come to rebuke you," David would probably have been prepared with some answer. That was a form of accusation which he very likely anticipated; and, we do not doubt, he had so armed himself with pleas of self-justification, and so skilfully "managed" his conscience, that the charge would scarcely have

impressed him at all. But, instead of this, the prophet began to tell him a narrative. "There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor." He went on further, as you know, detailing the various incidents of his story, until "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man," and he exlaimed, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Not till the solemn words, "Thou art the man!" had been uttered in his hearing, did the conviction come thoroughly home to his heart that he was really guilty. Now, why was it that Nathan's method was so effective? Because David had listened with interest to the story without supposing that it concerned *him*. His judgment was clear and unbiassed, and he came to the right conclusion before he perceived that the conclusion applied to himself. How much deeper and more permanent was the impression thus made than if the prophet had confined himself to a plain, literal examination of the right and wrong of David's own case! And we may see the same thing illustrated in our Lord's parables constantly, that they not only chain the attention of the listener by their pictorial character, but they set him thinking for himself, and drawing inferences about truths of the highest value, almost without being aware of it. The most effective lessons which enter the human heart are not those which take the form of lessons. It is when we are least conscious of the process by which we are impressed that we are impressed most deeply. And it is for this reason, if for no other, that the indirect teaching which is wrapped up in stories and metaphors

often secures more attention than teaching of a more direct and didactic kind.

Can Pictorial Power be acquired?

But it is very likely that some of you may be disposed to answer, "Yes, I know that teaching, when well illustrated by stories and parables, is far more interesting to children than if it is full of dry statements; but, then, the power to choose such illustrations wisely, and to make a good use of them, is, after all, a very rare power, and a very difficult one to acquire. I do not possess it, and I do not know how to get it. Besides, the creative genius which can invent skilful illustrations, is a special gift. It is rather the attribute of a poet than a teacher. I must learn to do without it."

Now, I cannot help sympathizing with any one who speaks thus, but I should like to encourage him a little nevertheless. We may all mend ourselves a great deal in this respect, if we try. Suppose we endeavour to remember carefully things which we have seen, and to describe them afterwards. Suppose we practise ourselves a little more than we do in the art of telling a story. Suppose, when we have read of a circumstance, or meet with one which has interested us, we sit down and try to reproduce it in our own language in writing. Suppose we watch carefully the sort of illustration and metaphor which excites our own attention, and then carefully husband it in our memories, with a view to making use of it in our classes. Suppose, when we are going to give a lesson on some Bible narrative, we study all its details and all its surrounding circumstances so well, that we can

almost realize the picture of it to ourselves. Suppose, in short, we always keep in view the necessity of rendering our teaching more vivid, and are always on the watch for material by which it may be made more so; I believe that we shall make a step in the right direction at least. Any man whose heart is in his work may do all this, and may become a very interesting teacher, without being a poet, and without possessing any peculiar natural gifts.

If you go to the seaside, and hear the rolling of the waves, or if you stand on a hill in view of some fair landscape, which the summer sun lights up with unusual glory, try to retain your impressions, and see how far you are able to convey the picture of the scene to others. If you want to give a lesson on St. Paul's preaching at Athens, try to find out what it was that the apostle could see as he stood on Mars Hill, with the temples of Minerva and of Theseus near him; with an eager, inquisitive crowd thronging round his feet; with the altar, and its mysterious inscription, "To the unknown God," just in sight; and with the blue waters of the Piræus spreading out beyond. And if you will do this; and if, meanwhile, you take care that your love of illustration never betrays you into levity or trifling; that you never tell stories for the sake of telling stories, but always for the sake of some valuable lesson which the story illustrates, I cannot doubt that, by God's blessing, you will become possessed, not only of one of the best instruments for keeping up the attention of little children, but also of a key which will unlock their hearts.

Another hint, which it seems to me is sometimes needed most by those who are the best teachers, is this—Do not get into a *stereotyped*, *routine method* of giving lessons. Different subjects admit of and require great diversity of treatment; and even if they did not, it would still be necessary to vary your mode of teaching constantly, for the sake of sustaining and keeping alive the interest of your class. Illustration, such as I have spoken of just now, is not always equally desirable; the lesson will not always fall into the same number of divisions; questions must not always be given in the same proportion, or at the same times. Almost every lesson does, in fact, demand a different treatment; and though there may be some one course which, on the whole, we have reason to prefer, we should not confine ourselves to it, but look into the nature of each subject when we are preparing it, and determine what is the best form in which it is likely to present itself to the mind. Besides, the method which is best for one teacher is not always the best for another; and no teacher is worth much who does not exercise a little originality and independence in the construction of those methods which are best suited to his special circumstances, and to what he knows to be the character of the children who compose his class. At any rate, remember that uniform methods have a tendency to destroy interest, and that prompt attention can only be kept up by varying our plans as occasion may require.

The advantage of a diversity of methods.

Again, it is very desirable that there should be a *coherence and unity* about the lessons of each

Sunday, so that the passage learnt by heart, and the hymns to be repeated, shall all have reference to the main subject of the day's lesson, and be in harmony with it. If possible, also, the lessons of each week should often be continuous, so that a particular portion of the Word of God should be thoroughly and exhaustively examined. By this means attention may often be concentrated upon a certain book or narrative for a succession of lessons, and the interest in these lessons may be kept up. We must beware of dissipating the attention of children, by leading them too hastily from one subject to another, or by giving them too many leasons which seem to have no mutual connection.

Importance of a well-arranged scheme of lessons.

Take a Bible Class for elder scholars, for example. A youth, who has had his mind chained down for a series of lessons to the investigation of one portion, however small, of the Word of God; who has examined it thoroughly; learnt texts and verses of hymns, which throw light upon it, or embody its truths; who has had all its hard words explained; has received much illustrative information about it; has been directed to the passages in library books which may be helpful in comprehending it, will never forget it as long as he lives. He will have a high standard in his mind as to the way in which Scripture should be studied. He will have a sort of fixed centre of knowledge, round which much of his future knowledge will cluster and arrange itself, and he will certainly be more likely to pay attention to the teaching when he sees that there is a purpose and a unity about it, than when he feels it to be desultory and

unconnected, and knows that if he misses one portion, the loss will not affect his comprehension of the rest.

Teaching must be thorough.

But one of the main safeguards of attention, after all, is to determine that, whatever you teach, you will not go on unless you carry the whole class with you. Very often we set down in our minds exactly what is the area which the lesson is to cover, and how much we mean to teach. We then go into the class, and find, perhaps, that we are not getting on so fast as we expected. So we push on hastily, in order that the plan on which we determined shall be carried out. Meanwhile, attention has flagged; stumbling-blocks have revealed themselves which we have not had time to remove, and we discover at the end that only one or two have kept pace with us. Now, it is far better to do a little thoroughly than to do a great deal superficially and unsoundly. We all know that. So it is far better to give half our intended lesson than the whole, if only the half could be well understood. We do not come to the Sunday school so much that we may *give* lessons, as that the children may receive them. Let us determine, therefore, that however little we teach, the whole of that little shall be learnt. Let us stop and recapitulate very often, especially if the class seems languid and indifferent; let us think no time lost which is spent in satisfying ourselves that what has been said is understood, and that we are making sure of our ground as we are going on. Let us pause whenever necessary, and put questions especially to the least attentive members of the class. And let us determine at every step to

secure that the whole of the children are advancing with us. It is wonderful so see how often really intelligent and valuable teachers seem to forget this. They take for granted that what is so clear to them, and what is evidently so plain to one or two, is therefore communicated to the whole of their pupils, whereas they ought to have evidence step by step of the fact. They should remember that attention once lost is a difficult thing to recover, and they should therefore be careful not to lose it. I am sure that more of us lose attention by going on too fast, and by attempting to teach too much, than we are inclined to believe. The best teacher is he who is never afraid of the drudgery of repeating, and going back, and questioning in many different forms; and who is content to move slowly, if only he can make the dullest member of the class move with him. After all, it is by the dull boy that you should measure your own progress in a lesson; not by the quick one. Move with the worst learner, not with the best, and then your pace will be sure at least, even though it be not very rapid.

The philosophy of attention.

And now I wish to remind you of two or three general, but very practical truths connected with what may be called the "philosophy of attention." The first of these is, that it is an *act of the will*. It is the one of all the mental faculties which is most under our own control. We *can* all be attentive, or at least more attentive than we are, if we wish to be so. The degree of attention we pay, therefore, depends on our own disposition to attend. This shows us that the matter, after all, is very largely one of

discipline, and that, all other things being equal, that teacher will win most attention who has most personal influence, and who is looked up to with the greatest respect.

Is there any one of you whom the children are accustomed to treat with disrespect? Do any of you find your commands disobeyed, and your look of anger disregarded? Depend upon it, if this be the case, that the disposition to attend to your teaching will not exist, and that you are sure to have trouble in your class. Depend upon it, also, that there is something in your own conduct, or manner, or character, which does not entitle you to be looked up to as you ought to be. Ask yourself, in that case, whether your own behaviour is uniform and dignified; whether you ever give commands without seeing that they are obeyed; whether you waste your words or your influence in any injudicious way; whether there is anything in your conduct that reveals to the children a want of punctuality, or of earnestness, or of steadiness on your part. For children are very keen observers of character, and, in the long run, are sure to feel loyalty and affection for one who is manifestly anxious to do them good, and who can be uniformly relied on in word and deed. There can be no thorough attention unless you accustom yourself to have perfect order; and therefore every step you can take to secure better discipline, and to gain more influence over the minds of the children, will indirectly tell upon the degree of attention you will obtain in teaching.

Nor must we forget that *attention is a habit*, and subject to the same laws which regulate all other

habits. These laws are very simple, and are very easy to understand. Every act we perform to-day becomes all the easier to perform to-morrow, simply because we have performed it to-day. And every duty we neglect to perform to-day becomes harder to perform to-morrow, and harder still the next day. Every faculty and power we possess is daily becoming either stronger or weaker: we cannot stand still, and our characters are becoming hardened and stereotyped every day, whether we wish or not—hardened, too, we must recollect, not according to what we think, or to what we wish to be, but according to what we *do*. Therefore, every time we listen languidly to an address, or read a book carelessly, the habit of inattention becomes strengthened, and it becomes less and less possible for us ever to become clear thinkers or steady reasoners. On the other hand, suppose we determine to make a great effort, and resolutely bind down our whole thoughts to a subject, the next time we wish to do the same thing the effort required will be less painful; the third time less painful still; until, at length, the habit of attention will grow on us, and will become easy and pleasant to us.

Attention is a habit.

What is the practical inference to be drawn from these simple truths? Why, that in all we do in schools, the habit of strict attention to rules should be cultivated, in little things as well as in great. If a boy is allowed to be unpunctual, to miscall words without being compelled to go back and correct himself, to read how he likes, to answer when he likes, to sit down when he is told to stand, to repeat tasks inaccurately, and to give a half-hearted

attention to the minor rules of the school, of course he will give half-hearted attention to the teaching. It would be wonderful if he did not. The habit of inattention is strengthened in little things, and necessarily shows itself in great. Do not, therefore, think lightly of the minor acts by which obedience and promptitude, and close watchfulness, can be cultivated. See that these minor acts are done well, and you will find that in this way the habit of listening attentively to your teaching will be confirmed.

Besides this, it is necessary to recollect that Sunday school teachers, like all other teachers, have a great deal to do with the formation of the intellectual habits which will cling to their pupils for the rest of their lives. Of course, apart from the primary and immediate object of imparting religious instruction, we ought all to feel some interest in the sort of mental character which our little scholars are acquiring during their intercourse with us. We must look forward to the time when the children will be men and women, and consider what sort of men and women we would have them to be. We cannot help desiring that when hereafter they read a book, they shall read it seriously; that, when they hear a sermon, they shall not bring preoccupied or wandering minds to what they hear; that, as they move along in life, they shall not be unobservant triflers, gazing in helpless vacancy on the mere surface of things, but shall be able to fix their eyes and their hearts steadily on all the sources of instruction which may be open to them. If they are ever to do this, it is necessary that they should have acquired in youth the power of concentrating their attention.

This power is the one qualification which so often constitutes the main difference between the wise and the foolish, the successful and the unsuccessful man. Attention is the one habit of the human mind which, perhaps more than any other, forms a safeguard for intellectual progress, and even, under the Divine blessing, for moral purity. Now, every time a child comes into your class, this habit is either strengthened or weakened. Something is sure to be done, while the children are with you, either to make them better or worse in this respect for the whole of their future lives. If you claim and secure perfect obedience; if, without being severe, you can be strict enough to enforce diligent attention to all you say, you are attaining another important end besides that which is usually contemplated by Sunday school work, for you are developing the intellectual vigour of your scholar, and familiarizing him with a sort of effort which will be of immense use to him hereafter. But, every time you permit disorder, trifling, or wandering, you are helping to lower and vitiate the mental character of your pupils. You are encouraging them in a bad habit. You are, in fact, doing something to prevent them from ever becoming thoughtful readers, diligent observers, and earnest listeners, as long as they live.

Attention is the basis of success in life.

We are, I hope, brought by these reflections within sight of the one great rule, on which not merely all attention, but all true success in teaching depends. *Try to feel with the children, to understand their natures, and to discern what is going on in their minds.* Do

Child-study is essential.

not half the faults of our teaching arise from a want of thorough acquaintance with the little ones, and of true insight into their mental and moral nature? Does not this lie at the root of much of the inattention of which we complain? The truth is, that a good teacher ought not only to possess that sympathy which makes him feel *for* a child, and love him, and try to do him good; but the sympathy which feels *with* him, which makes due allowance for his imperfectly developed nature, and which thoroughly comprehends his character and wants.

And here the young teacher has certain advantages. Perhaps he has not forgotten how he felt as a learner and what sort of things interested and affected him; how knowledge looked when it was first presented to his view, and what was the kind of teaching which best secured an entrance for that knowledge into the recesses of his mind. If you have nearly forgotten these things strive with all your mind to recall them. As you grow in knowledge, in thoughtfulness, and experience, take diligent care not to lose the remembrance of what you were years ago. He is always the wisest teacher who can combine the man's intellect and the child's heart; who contrives to keep fresh in his memory the knowledge of what he once was, and what a child's wants, and a child's likes and dislikes, and a child's infirmities really are.

The snare of adultism.

We are sometimes so glad to find ourselves *men*, that we take a pleasure in casting off the traditions, and the habits, and the thoughts, of childhood. But a really earnest and loving Christian teacher will esteem every recol-

lection very precious which helps him better to understand the nature of the being on whose heart he is going to work; he will be very careful not to set up a man's standard to measure a child by; he will always ask himself—when preparing or giving a lesson—not "What will it seem proper for me to say?" but "What is the thing best adapted for these children to hear?" He will be careful to cultivate an intimate acquaintance with childhood, and all its little whims and follies. He will ask God daily to enlarge his own heart, and to make him sympathize with every form of childish weakness, except sin; and he will very diligently lay to heart the secret meaning of the solemn warning which our Saviour addressed to his disciples: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." I think that such a teacher will not want any one to give him rules for sustaining the interest of his class, because he will have good hold of the principle which will enable him to devise rules for himself. I believe that such a teacher will be sure to win attention, and when he has won it, will be likely to keep it.

MEMORY:

ITS NATURE AND USE

It is of paramount importance to a teacher who wishes to succeed in his work, that he should understand something of the nature and functions of the human mind. It has been said by an ancient philosopher, that "on earth there is nothing great but man: in man there is nothing great but mind."

It is this wonderful, complicated, and noble work of God with which teachers essay to deal: the most mysterious and multiform piece of organization in the world! Why, of all the marvels of science, such as in modern times are constantly inviting us to strain our eyes in wonderment, there is after all no such sublime object of contemplation as a human soul! There is power, and resource, and faculty in the inner man, even of the humblest among us, which is ten times more marvellous than the most gigantic and complex piece of mechanism in existence. When therefore we, as teachers, attempt to bring our influence and our will to bear upon the minds and hearts of our fellow creatures, we are assuming a very great responsibility; and we cannot discharge that responsibility aright, unless we make the workings of the human intellect an object of special study.

Now, of all the phenomena of mind, few are more interesting to us all than those of which we speak

compendiously under the names of "Memory" or "Recollection." Shakespeare says that man is a being

> "Of such large discourse,
> Looking before and after."

It is this which mainly distinguishes us from the lower animals; that whereas they live wholly in the present—or if they seem conscious of the past, or provident for the future, are so merely in virtue of a blind instinct—man is endowed with a surprising faculty of recalling past thoughts and past events, and making them as much the objects of contemplation at this moment as if they were actually present. He is not merely dependent on what his eyes can see, or his ears listen to, or his appetites enjoy *now*, but he has been endowed with the power of re-creating and re-producing his past impressions, past scenes, and past joys; he has "thoughts which wander through eternity;" strange visions of the unseen, or of what was once seen, and which the bodily eye can see no longer.

In his hour of gloom or despondency he may yet enjoy as vividly as ever the picture of some past delight, or feed on the memory of a happy moment, which, though long perished in fact, can never, by the blessed influence of memory, be lost to him on this side of the grave. Or, in the midst of prosperity and abounding wealth, he is yet forced to taste the bitter ashes of repentance, and to recall unforgotten sins. He cannot, even if he would, live wholly in the present: the days that are gone, and the thoughts and notions of past years, *will* make themselves present to him, and become parts of his

being, and of his life. It is the law of nature, and the condition of his progress, that he should thus be able to remember.

It is obvious that, as teachers, we are all very anxious to avail ourselves of this wonderful power. It is one of our first duties to reach the memory, and make it retain what we communicate. Perhaps we think of it as a *storehouse*, in which much may be housed; and if so, we want to fill it with what is good: or we think of it as a fair *tablet*, on which much may be indelibly written; and we want to cover its pages with what is pure and right: or we think of it as a *chain* or *line*, by which old and half-buried thoughts may be recovered from the gulf of the past; and we long to attach it to some precious relics, so that, whenever used, it shall only draw up from the deep that which will be valuable and helpful to the pupil in after life.

But there is no end to the similitudes which might be used on this point, nor to the list of different things to which it has been compared. I would rather, however, invite you to think of memory not as a thing but as a *faculty;* to dismiss all metaphor, and simply to ask yourselves the questions, "What is it which happens in the mind when we say that we remember a thing? How does this power of remembering operate? How far is it under our own control? What is the sort of discipline by which it may be made to do the greatest quantity of work, and so to subserve our highest intellectual interests?" To all teachers these questions are important. They all undertake to cultivate the memories of children; they set lessons to be learnt by heart; they are grieved and humbled when their

teaching is forgotten: they are, therefore, especially interested to know what memory is, and what can be done and ought to be done with it.

Now, the first thing that strikes me when I look into my own mind is, that the various thoughts and notions which keep passing through it do not come singly, but seem to be connected with one another. It seems as if it was in the nature of things that whenever any single idea is present to my mind, it should bring some other idea with it. We are not always equally conscious of this; for while our eyes are open, or we are listening to another's voice, or any one of the senses is exerting itself, we are, of course, at the mercy of external suggestion, and we surrender our minds, as it were, to follow the current of thought suggested from without. Thus, those of you who are listening to me at this moment are resigning the current of your thoughts, so to speak, to my guidance, and the train of ideas is the result of external suggestion, not of any internal process. But suppose that my voice was silent, that this room was in darkness, that you were quietly sitting alone, and that you let your mind have its own way, without any sort of direction from without; you would then find yourself thinking about many things, perhaps strange and unusual, but nevertheless just as numerous, and your ideas would be just as vivid as those are which you are now deriving from your senses of vision and hearing.

The procession of ideas.

You would notice, also, if you took pains to examine what was going on in such circumstances, that the images and pictures which thus kept passing through your minds, whether they marched

in slow and solemn procession, or hurried along with the rapidity of a torrent, were yet not wholly disjointed and incongruous. You might be bewildered by their variety, or startled by their strangeness, but if you stopped for a moment, and dwelt on any two contiguous ideas, you would discover some link of connection between them; you would find that each one had, in fact, *suggested* the next. You might be thinking of Sebastopol; and then, in an instant, of the siege of Jerusalem; and then of Titus, and of the Romans; and then of methods of Roman warfare; and then of the different forms of heroism; and then of the brave Arctic voyagers, and the enemies which they had to encounter—the biting cold, the darkness, and the long, desolate winter in the ice. It might be that all these images were present to your minds in the space of two or three seconds; but what I want you to observe is, that between each of them and its successor there is a kind of mental *tie* or *link*. Either by resemblance or by contrast, or by connecting cause and effect, or perhaps even by something so trivial as the accidental likeness between two names or words, each thought which comes before the mind, comes to it, in some sort, as a sequel to the last, each brings another with it.

The ideas are linked together.

When the mind is at liberty to act, this is always the law of its action. Even when the mind is not acting independently, but is influenced by words which are brought before it, it is simply because the words suggest certain thoughts. Your minds have learned by long practice to associate particular meanings with particular words; and hence, when

I utter the words, the meanings come with them, unbidden, by virtue of external suggestion. So when we see pictures or landscapes, the mind never contents itself with the reception merely of the intelligence or the image which the eye brings to it, but is always led to think of something else; to draw some reflection, to make some comparison, to contemplate something which either has happened, will happen, or might happen. That is what philosophers call the *law of association* or *mental suggestion*. And thus the history of all our knowledge is the history of the associations which our minds form. Whether a mind be well developed and well stocked, on the one hand, or feebly and badly taught, on the other, depends mainly on the nature of its habits with regard to this one principle of suggestion or association. If, when one thought comes before a mind it brings others with it which are useful and ennobling, we say the mind is a healthy one. If, on the other hand, the occurrence of one thought only brings vague, or trivial, or worthless ideas in its train, the mind is not in health.

The law of association.

For instance, suppose when the thought of William the Conqueror is brought before my mind, it brings with it the notion of some other conqueror, as Julius Cæsar, and I am led instantly to institute a comparison between the two, and to determine how far one resembled the other, and in what they differed, there is an exercise of *judgment*. Suppose, however, that when the thought is before me, there instantly comes into my mind a consideration of the causes of that conquest, its effects on the English character, and the general results of

military despotism; the effort which my mind makes is what is called *reasoning*, but is, nevertheless, nothing but a peculiar kind of mental suggestion. Or again, if the conception of that event, when it arises in my mind, suggests to me some analogies in the moral or material world, or some striking metaphor, or reveals to me some subtle, underlying truth, which gives unity and harmony to my whole conception of that one event, considered as a type of others, then the *imagination* is said to be employed. It may be that the name of the Conqueror only brings with it some merely verbal assonance; a playful or accidental analogy, such as strikes a quick ear, or a lively superficial fancy; and then we may call the result *wit*, or *humour*, or even a *pun*. Lastly, if, when the name of the Conqueror is mentioned, there come up at the same time the date 1066, the name and position of Normandy, the particulars of the battle of Hastings, and the new form of government which the Normans established—if, in fact, the particular thought brought before me only brings in its train those other words and thoughts which have been connected with it before—we say there is an effort of recollection, and the power is called *memory*.

The nature of memory.

Now, all these mental phenomena depend alike on the laws of association. Whether a man is a logician, or a poet, or a wit, or a philosopher, he is so by virtue of the peculiar habit of his mind, and the sort of link by which his thoughts are generally connected. But when we say a person has a good memory, we mean that his mind is so constituted that associations once formed

in it are *permanent;* that, having once heard of two or more things together, each one ever after suggests the other; that it is easy for him to recall circumstances, names, events, and thoughts which have once been brought before him in mental connection, and to know that they have been thus connected.

Now, when we look at these several mental faculties, we are led to inquire which of them it is most important to us as teachers to cultivate. I know what reply teachers used to give to this question. The memory, of course. What is teaching but storing the mind with facts? Hence, in all the old-fashioned schools—perhaps in those which we went to in childhood—you know that the whole education, so called, consisted in learning *tasks;* saying by heart certain words from a book. There was little or nothing else. And you know what a hard, dry, wearisome thing that perpetual grinding away at the memory was. Well, when education began to be looked at with a little more care, there came a reaction against this system. Pious and benevolent men, like Lancaster, or Pestalozzi, or David Stow, or Wilderspin, rose up to say, "This will never do. We must not crush the mental energies of a child in this way. We do not want so much to fill him with the thoughts of other men, as to teach him how to think. He has got reason, judgment, reflection, thoughtfulness, perception; and all these are nobler faculties than memory; we will try to cultivate them. He is a thinking being, with a destiny to accomplish, a life to live, and a soul to be saved, and we want

Importance of the faculty.

to develop his active powers, and not merely to fill him with the acquisitions which have been gained by other men." So it became the fashion among teachers to seek to address themselves to the judgment of their children, and to try rather to carry the sympathies of their pupils with them, and to convey to them the power to use something like spontaneous efforts after the attainment of knowledge, than to be able to reproduce the words or thoughts of others. And accordingly, it has come to pass, that in many schools this faculty of memory has come to be very much disregarded, and almost despised, as if it were not worth attention.

Its place in education.

Now you know that the opposite of wrong is not always right; and you will agree with me, that those who have sought to discredit the memory, and to dispense with it in their teaching, have perhaps been almost as far from the truth as those who relied too much upon it. We want, of course, to know what is the true place which this power holds in education; and I think that to do this we have only to look into our own experience, and just ask ourselves what share it has had in our own development. When you and I try to answer this question, I think we shall say to ourselves, "I know that the best and most valuable part of my training has been that which has set my own mind at work. It is when I have observed, and reasoned, and reflected, and drawn my own conclusions, that I have felt my mind to be gathering the greatest strength." On the whole, we find verified in our own experience Cowper's beautiful distinctions between knowledge and wisdom:

"Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in heads attentive to their own."

And just as wisdom is a higher thing than knowledge, because it depends rather on the creative and originating powers of the mind than on its mere power of reception; so reason, and judgment, and intelligence, are higher faculties than memory, because by them we can originate new thoughts, while by the latter we can only reproduce old ones.

Yet, for all this, how much richer we should all be if we had better memories! How many precious truths, and sparkling illustrations, and suggestive ideas, and burning words, have come before us, and faded away, like visions of the night, leaving no traces! What wealth has passed through our hands in this way; and how we have longed to retain it, and mourned over its loss! Why, if we had only better memories, we should have had so much more material on which our own independent faculties might have worked. No; we cannot afford to despise this faculty. The poorer and the weaker we feel ourselves to be as thinkers, the more we are dependent on what we can remember; and, therefore, when we turn our thoughts from ourselves, and look at the children in our Sunday schools, we cannot help coming to the conclusion that, though other mental powers may seem to claim more honour from the philosopher, this power of *remembering* is a power which we must contrive to exercise and turn to good account. It may be that lazy teachers have been accustomed, in old times, to rely wholly

upon it, because it was more easy to deal with it mechanically than with any other faculty; but that is no reason why we should not, though without relying wholly upon it, seek to use it as wisely and effectively as we can.

Even at the risk of wearying you by repetition, I must ask you again to remember that memory is altogether a matter of association. When the thoughts of past events come back, they never come alone, or leap independently into the mind. If they come at all, they come in a train of suggestion. We cannot by an effort of will recall any fact or idea we want. If we could, that would seem to imply that we already knew the thing we wanted to think about. Let us look into our own minds, and ask ourselves what happens when we try to recall a person's name, a date, or the words of a quotation. We can't turn our minds instantly to it, for we don't know where or what it is; but this is what we do: we select that one of our present thoughts which seems most likely to have some relation to the one we want; we dwell on this, in the hope that it will suggest another; we surrender ourselves, in fact, to the operation of the laws of suggestion; and as new ideas arise, we fasten our attention in succession upon those which seem most likely to lead us in the right track. At last, perhaps, we come upon the desired fact or word.

Memory is association.

Let me illustrate this. I meet with a fragment of a text, and I do not at once know what the rest of it is, or in what connection it occurs. Well, I dwell on the words which are before me;

I strive to exclude for the moment all foreign or irrelevant ideas. The words, as I mentally utter them, perhaps at first remind me of some other words a little like them, but in a line of poetry; and then the line and its context come up unbidden into my thoughts; but since this is not what I want, I refuse to follow this track, and dwell still more earnestly on the words I had at first, in the hope that a more promising train of association will disclose itself. Then, perhaps, there comes the echo of another word of the text, or perhaps the recollection of the sound of the preacher's voice as I once heard it uttered; perhaps even a picture comes before the eye, of the Bible as I read it, and I seem to see the words in a particular corner of the page; or, perchance, the faint reflection of some emotion which long ago came into my mind when I heard it, or of some lesson I learnt from it. I fasten my mind upon any one of these traces, and at length one word suggests another, until the whole text is brought before me. Then I remember the context; then I see how it stands in the argument or the narrative; then all I ever knew about the words and their author comes before me, and I say I have remembered it.

Now, observe here that it is not strictly true to say, I have *recalled this text* to my memory, or that I have fetched the fact out of the storehouse of my mind. Of course, as a popular and loose explanation this is well enough. But the fact is, the thing has not come back to me in obedience to any effort of my will, but has been brought back by the exercise of the ordinary laws of

association, each thought having suggested the next, while I, in fact, had no power to determine in what order they should follow. All that I have done is to exercise a little judgment in choosing which of all the thoughts which thus passed in procession before me was most nearly akin to what I wanted, to fasten my attention on it, to refuse to dwell on any that were trivial or unsuitable, and to let the spontaneous action of my own faculties do the rest. In fact, the *positive* part of the process, the suggestion of the desired words, has been involuntary: it is only what may be called the *negative* part—the refusal to entertain some ideas, and the disposition to welcome others, and to arrest them as they came—which was voluntary. I cannot hope that you will accept this as a true account of memory merely because I say it; but I ask you to put the matter to a practical test, and watch the operation of your own minds when you try to recall the name of a person, the date of an event, the words of a poem, the look, the circumstances, the nature, the semblance of anything that is past. I believe you will find that in point of fact you do not recall these things, but only resign yourselves to the operation of the laws of suggestion, in the hope that they will recall them for you. The thing you want to recollect, if it is attainable at all, is one link of a chain of association of which some other link is already in your power. You don't know how far off it is, nor are you always sure in what particular direction it lies; but you put your hand on it, and mentally you feel your way along its length rather in the dark, perhaps, and having

nothing to guide you but your own desire to reach it, and a determination to rest satisfied with no other thought which comes into your mind, until you have found that of which you are in search.

Now, this faculty of memory is one to which, as teachers, we are constantly appealing. We want so to teach that the ideas which we bring before the mind, when they reappear hereafter, shall come back with all the thoughts, explanations, and moral lessons which we have associated with them. To speak popularly, there are *three* attributes which characterize a good memory: first, it should be *capacious*, or should hold a great deal, and have a large store of ideas duly associated together; secondly, it should be *retentive*, or capable of keeping the ideas and notions which are thus connected strongly fixed together, so that the tie by which they are once bound shall not be easily loosened; thirdly, it should be *ready*, prompt, and able to go back without difficulty or hesitation whenever its owner desires to reproduce past impressions.

The qualities of a good memory.

But all these qualities are dependent, in a great degree, on the manner in which the thoughts to be remembered are originally united together. And the point which necessarily interests teachers most is this consideration: How can I best forge or fasten ideas together in a child's mind? The most practical answer to this question is of course to be found in our own experience. What are the most lasting impressions on our own memory, and how were they originally made? This question admits of several answers.

Which impressions are the most lasting?

I. Associations between two thoughts or ideas

may be rendered permanent by the *frequency with which they are brought before the mind in contact.* You and I have learnt many things by heart, without ever wishing or trying to learn them, but simply because they have been said in our hearing very often. Thus we associate common objects with their names. We know the names of our neighbours and friends, and the words of many familiar texts and hymns, because these things have come before our minds in a certain connection so frequently, that their connection has become firmly established. You cannot hear one sentence of the Lord's Prayer without being instantly reminded of the next. It comes without any effort of yours. You cannot hear the name of an intimate acquaintance pronounced at any time without instantly having before you the picture of his countenance and the echo of his voice. The links which unite a particular word, in each of these cases, with certain images and impressions, have been firmly fastened without any effort of yours. The business has been done mechanically by the mere force of repetition. I suppose that if I spent an hour to-night saying over and over again one single sentence, and you were patient enough to listen, you might probably be surprised, and most likely vexed, but you would not forget that sentence in a hurry; and the probability is, that whenever you saw me again you would think of that sentence, and be at all times able to complete it when a single word of it was suggested; not because you cared for it, or wished to recollect it, but simply because of its wearisome reiteration. I need not

1. Those that have frequently been repeated.

go into other illustrations of this fact; the evidence of it must be very clear to all of you.

II. Associations, and relations between ideas, are rendered permanent in the mind by the *interest which is felt when they are brought together.* You hear a speaker, perhaps, who contrives to chain or fascinate you in a remarkable way. There is something in the tones of his voice, in the deep earnestness of his manner, and in the weight or pungency of his words, which strikes you with unusual force. For a time, the whole apprehensive and receptive faculty of your nature is at work: you look earnestly, you feel deeply, your nature seems to be straining itself to appreciate, to understand, and to receive. He dissects and enforces some text of Scripture, perhaps; or he urges some truth upon your notice by the help of some very powerful and striking illustration. What is the consequence? You cannot forget what he says. He only says it once; you never hear it again; but years afterwards the memory of the man, or the scene, or the subject, brings up with it his arguments and teaching. The link of connection which has been formed here has been made once for all; not slowly hammered again and again, to make it firm, but riveted at one blow.

2. Those that have interested us.

You walk through a picture gallery. You refer to your catalogue a score of times to see the names of the artists. The majority of those names will wholly have disappeared to-morrow. You will have identified the name with the picture just for a moment, but the association will fade altogether before long. But here there is one

picture which challenges all your admiration and interest. It is of a scene from some poem you admire, or a picture of a place you know. It is treated with feeling; and there is evident a delicacy of perception as to the real beauty of the scene, with which you feel yourself instantly in sympathy. Again you look into the catalogue, and ascertain the name of the artist; but this time the case is very different. Once ascertained, the name is sure to be remembered. You cannot forget it, simply because the association of the picture with the artist's name has interested you. You do not need to hear the name again. Ever after, the sound of his name will be sure, without any desire of yours, to recall the impression of his picture, and the thoughts of the scene will recall his name.

Need I attempt to illustrate this obvious truth in any other way? Call to mind the experience of every-day life. You meet crowds of faces in the streets; you hear hundreds of things every day; you read many things in newspapers, and magazines, and books, and the vast majority of these impressions fade away as soon as they are made. Links of association are formed; but they are snapped like threads; and when the mind tries to return to them (if it ever does), it finds the line of continuity broken, and the recovery of the lost ideas hopeless. And this is simply because there was no feeling of strong interest in the thing at first; no effort of attention on your part to *keep* together what was thus casually brought into contact. But if one face in the crowd had seemed to you especially full of meaning, that is the face which you would not forget, and which would

appear hereafter in your dreams and fancies. If there was one fact in your reading which struck you as being particularly valuable, that is the fact on which you will hereafter dwell, and which your memory will retain. If there was one scene on which your eye rested at some moment of deep emotion, when your life had reached a particularly critical stage, or when your heart was unusually susceptible of strong impressions, that is the scene the picture of which would (to use the popular language on this subject) imprint itself on the memory; or, to speak with more correctness, that is the scene all the component details of which would be most indelibly and firmly associated with one another, and with the feeling you had while you beheld it. We are thus entitled, I think, to consider the second of my propositions proved: "That the strength and durability of mental associations is in proportion to the attention paid to them when they are first formed, to the interest felt in them, and to the vividness and intensity of the emotions with which they are at first regarded."

III. But, again, there is a third condition of the permanence of our mental impressions which deserves consideration. I mean the *desire felt*, on the part of the person himself, to retain the knowledge, and to keep its several parts together. In the two cases I have already described, it is possible for a man to remember things without wishing it; constant repetition will sometimes force ideas into the minds of the most reluctant listeners; or great interest and curiosity may be excited when we are half-ashamed to find ourselves fascinated or

3. Those that we desired to retain.

interested at all. Or the eye may be so familiarized with a certain picture that it cannot see one half without thinking of the other. Memory, therefore, is quite possible without any exertion of the *will*, and without putting forth any moral strength in the way of *purpose* or deliberate choice. But, after all, when such strength is put forth, memory is greatly assisted. For keeping ideas chained together in proper sequence and relation, there is nothing like a strong *wish* to have them so chained. Here the moral nature acts upon the intellectual, and the beautiful harmony between the two becomes evident.

Philosophers talk of the *intellect* and the *will* as of two distinct things; but though you may distinguish them in theory, you cannot separate them in action or fact. And I believe that half of the complaints people make about their bad memories arise from moral rather than intellectual deficiencies. A man tells you that he cannot remember dates, or that he has no head for mathematics. Why, that same man, if he had deliberately sat down, and having persuaded himself of the importance of recollecting certain dates, or of the value of a mathematical truth, said to himself, "Now I must acquire this—I will not let it go;" and then seriously bent all the strength and resolution there was in him to the accomplishment of the task, would soon find that the fault did not lie in the faculties which God had given him, but in the way in which those faculties had been used. He finds that his memory is good enough, if only his will is strong enough. And I believe that it is in the power of every one of us to have a much

better memory than he possesses, if he will only look at the various ideas which he wants to connect, with sufficient steadfastness, and hold them in his grasp with a determination that they shall not leave him, until they are so welded together that they shall never be separated in the mind. Try this when you next sit down to read a book. Determine within yourselves, "These facts or these arguments are worth remembering; so I must and will remember them." Read the book with that feeling strong upon you, and see what a difference it will make. You have forgotten much that you have read before; but if you look back, in nine cases out of ten the reason has been that you did not *care* to remember it; you read it with lax attention, or a feeble will, and without any strong wish to retain it. We say in such cases that nature is in fault, and excuse ourselves by throwing the blame upon our constitution, or our mental endowments, or our bad menory.

How many are there of us, I should like to know, who ever gave our natural gifts fair play in this respect, or who know how much we are capable of? I do not know of a more mournful reflection than the thought of the vast amount of unused capacity in the world. How many powers lie dormant, and are never used! What a wonderful and unsuspected faculty has been bestowed on us by the Divine Father! Surely, He fashioned the mind of man so that it should be

> "A mansion for all lovely thoughts;
> His memory as a dwelling-place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies;"

and yet many of us live and die, not only without

using these faculties, but without even knowing that we possess them. We have powers within us which we never put forth; we have knowledge and happiness within our reach which we never take the trouble to grasp; we have a wonderful mental apparatus within us which we never set in motion; and the old parable of the talent wrapped up in a napkin, and hidden in the earth, is illustrated day by day in the lives of all of us; so that we carry down to the grave with us cunning instruments all rusted and unused; chambers meant for the reception of noble guests, all unfurnished and desolate; gifts and graces without number which we have never cared to look at, or to count. Let us do ourselves the justice, then, to believe, that our native powers are indeed capable of greater things than those which we are achieving every day; that we *could* remember many things if we only took pains to do so; and that a strong effort of will would marvellously improve the capacity and retentiveness of our memory, did we only accustom ourselves to make it.

4. Those that are linked by logical associations.

IV. There is yet one other circumstance which helps to determine the firmness with which our thoughts become connected together; and that is, the degree in which we *understand the nature of the tie which unites them.* Now of course there are many cases in which this is impossible. The association between a piece of wood and the word "desk" is a purely arbitrary one. Any other word would have done as well. So the association between the Exodus of the children of Israel and the figures 1200 B.C. is of the same kind. There is no

reason why it should not have occurred in another year. Here the notions which are to be united in the mind have no necessary or logical unity; so if they are to be connected in my mind at all, it must be by some purely mechanical process. The understanding has nothing to do with the memory in these associations. But in the case of the words of a text, or a rule in grammar, or any matter in which the facts are related to one another in *meaning*, it is important that we should understand that meaning. Here, our judgment, and reflection, and reasoning powers come in to help memory, and contribute to forge the link which unites our ideas together. All other things being equal, we are most likely to remember that which we best understand. I will not stay to illustrate this fact: a little analysis of your own mental experience will prove it to be the case.

So far, we have been talking about what passes in our own minds. What has all this to do with our work as teachers, and with the little ones whom we meet in the Sunday school? I believe it has much to do with it, and that, after all, the best practical rules which are to be had in teaching, are those which arise out of the investigation of our own mental history and experience. Now, if you have followed me so far, you will observe that there are four several conditions under which the union or concatenation of ideas takes place, and is likely to be rendered permanent: frequency of repetition; the attention and interest with which a truth is regarded; the desire to acquire it; and the degree in which the understanding has been exercised upon it.

Now, what is the obvious practical inference from all this? You all want to make children remember what you teach. Here, then, are four possible methods of doing it. Take your choice. You *may force a child* to remember a thing by dint of mere mechanical repetition. You make him and yourself thoroughly weary of it, by telling a truth, or urging a duty, Sunday after Sunday, in the same unvarying monotonous words. It is a troublesome plan, I grant. The thing will have to be said many, many times, before it is appropriated by your scholar. Constant repetition will perhaps wear the meaning out of the words; so that when at last they *are* learnt, all the freshness and interest they ever had has disappeared, and you and your pupils seem to know less about it than you did at first. Still you will do it.

The bearing of this upon teaching.

A clergyman, the rector of a Hampshire parish, told me, the other day, of an over-grown lad, who came up to him to be examined for confirmation, and who, when asked in plain terms how many sacraments there were, was quite unable to tell; but when the words of the question in the catechism, "How many sacraments hath Christ ordained in His church?" were repeated, instantly replied in the language of the book, "Two only, as generally necessary to salvation; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord." He could repeat these words rapidly enough: when, however, the original question was put again, he was as unable as before to tell how many sacraments there were. He could understand no question, and could give no answer, except in the precise

stereotyped form in which they had always been repeated. But neither question nor answer had any *meaning* for him. This hopeful youth had a memory, but what it retained was held together merely by the first of the ties I have described. His teacher had been content to teach mechanically, and the pupil had been degraded into a machine.

Now, you all, I dare say, feel that it would be dishonourable to you to be teachers on these terms. What, then, is the alternative? if you can awaken a little interest in the subject, or challenge the attention, or excite any intellectual sympathy, you may get the lesson learnt by fewer repetitions. If you can get twice as much interest and attention, the repetitions may become fewer still. If you can get three times as much interest, you need still less of reiteration. It is a fair proportion sum. This fastening of ideas and words together may be a mechanical process, or it may be an intelligent process; or it may be partly one and partly the other; but in exactly the proportion in which you employ the one kind of instrument, you may dispense with the other. Teaching always demands labour; but it is here as it is in almost all duties and professions in life: you may save intellectual labour by mechanical labour, and you may save mechanical labour by intellectual. Which do you prefer? Perhaps you feel teaching to be drudgery. Quite true. But in just the proportion in which you become more interested in it, the drudgery will diminish. Every new illustration you can use, every glance of sympathy you can excite, every charm with which you can invest your subject, every appeal you can make to the judgment, to

the imagination, or to the conscience, will make you less of a drudge. Teaching, like all other work, becomes ennobled and beautified in exact proportion to the zeal and effort, sympathy and love, we put into it. Without these, working away at the memory is the sorriest and dullest occupation in the world: with it the same task becomes an honourable, nay more, a most charming and delightful employment.

The function of verbal memory.

Are we never, then, to have anything like rote-work or task-work? Is nothing to be learnt by heart in our schools? This is an important question, and one which I think we are in a position to answer. Now, many things which we remember are not recollected, in any particular form of words: for instance, historical events, if we know them at all, we know in their proper sequence and relation as events, not in any particular phraseology. If I remember the facts about the life of Moses, or know the course of the children of Israel in their journeys, or the substance of a book on natural history which I once read, or can describe the general scope and aim of Bishop Butler's argument in the *Analogy*, my recollections need not take any specific form: there are a hundred ways in which I may with equal accuracy bring my stores to light. In these cases *ideas* have been associated, and not mere words. But if I repeat a piece of poetry, or a text of Scripture, or an answer from a catechism, and make a mistake only of a single word, I do not *know* it thoroughly. If I am asked a question in the multiplication table, or about the date of an event, an error of a single figure is im-

portant. Now, these latter cases we may call cases of *verbal memory*, where the object is simply to remember certain words and figures in one particular order, and no other. The former cases we may call, for distinction, examples of *rational* memory, because the connection established is one in which the reason is more concerned, and because by it *thoughts* only have to be united, and not words. In our Sunday schools we have to appeal to both of these forms of memory, and it is a great point to know when to employ one and when the other.

Now, of the two, there is no doubt that what I have called *rational* associations—or those which are kept together by some true relations of cause and effect, or of principle and reason—are the highest and most important. The best things in our own memories are not those which are held there in the shape of formularies and phrases, but those with which our thoughts, and likings, and judgments are associated. Nevertheless, there must be such a thing as learning by heart in schools. How far, and when?

I shall confine myself, in answering this question, to the case of Sunday schools; although I need not say that a much wider reply would be required if other schools were contemplated. For you, however, I may safely say,

I. That the verbal memory requires to be exercised in the learning of *Scripture texts*. It is not only necessary that the child should understand the meaning and be familiar with the general contents of the sacred writings; he ought also to have, stored up in his mind, a great many entire passages and extracts,

1. To learn Scripture.

But here we are dealing with something too sacred and important to be left to general impressions, or to the understanding alone. All students of Holy Scripture know that not only are its truths of paramount value, but also that those truths are expressed in the choicest and best language. Apart from its higher claims, the Bible would commend itself to teachers simply on the ground of the purity of its style, and the wonderful clearness and force with which its contents are expressed. For this reason, and in order to promote a due reverence for the Divine Word, the passages which are learnt should be learnt by heart, and should be repeated with *literal accuracy*. This, then, is one of the ways in which learning by heart and repeating by rote are not only legitimate but desirable. Every one of your scholars should have fixed in his mind a good store of selected texts, and of consecutive passages, which he can repeat without the smallest mistake. Who knows how precious such possessions may prove in after life? Who knows in what hours of temptation, or sorrow, or danger, or solicitude, the mind may travel back along the chain of association, and find in the memory of those sacred words a source of safety and of blessing?

2. Hymns and poetry.

II. Again, *hymns and verses of poetry* may be very lawfully committed to the custody of what I have called the verbal memory. In these it is not enough to remember the sense, or the meaning, or the substance; we ought to have the precise words. These are always the easiest exercises of memory which we can have, because the rhyme, and the metre, and

the cadence are in themselves pleasing to the ear, and go far to diminish the effort required in learning them. So if you will take pains to select suitable verses, it is quite right and wise to insist on their being learnt by heart. There are few things which come up more pleasantly to the ear in after life than the memory of sweet verses which we have learnt in youth. They are seldom logical and dry: they appeal especially to the feelings, though they often contain truth of the most valuable kind, in a compressed and concentrated form. Then, there is a kind of musical echo about them, which, even when we do not actually repeat them, and they only linger faintly down in the depths of the mind, gives us pleasure, we hardly know why. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Psalms of David have in all ages been felt to be so precious, and have inspired pure thoughts and heavenward emotions in every age. What a charm there is about them when they are really well and happily rendered into verse!

"O God, our help in ages past,
Our strength for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home."

Who is there who is not the richer for having once learnt words like these? What little child is not touched and delighted, as well as instructed, when he first learns to repeat,

"Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,
Once became a child like me:
Oh that in my whole behaviour
He my pattern still may be!"

Let us keep ever in view the fact that in the midst of the storm and struggle of life, the little one whom we have at school will some day be striving. Many a time may come in his future life when he may be far from books, from the voice of a teacher, and from all right influences, and when (though he is not able to make any effort to shape or recall his own thoughts) the words of a sacred song will come up before him with a soothing and elevating power which nothing else could furnish, and though all unbidden, will yet bring valuable thoughts in their train.

Here, then, are two things in regard to which we may safely and wisely appeal to that power of merely *verbal association* which I have described:—passages of Scripture and verses of religious poetry. And the reason for this is very simple. In both these cases, not only is the *substance* of the thing remembered valuable, but the exact *form* is also important. There being in these cases a certain fitness and propriety in certain words, we must make the children remember the words *as well as* the ideas which they signify.

Now, how does this apply to the learning of catechisms, or to learning whole pages of an ordinary book by heart?

Concerning catechizing and catechisms.

In catechisms certain questions are given, and particular answers are appended. These answers are generally learnt by heart; and a child is not said to *know* his catechism unless he can repeat every word without a mistake. Now, the only really valuable end aimed at in a catechism is, that a certain subject should be *understood*. The phraseology in which

the answer is couched is probably neither better nor worse than the language which any person who understood the subject would spontaneously use. In this case, what you want is an association of *thoughts*, what you insist on is an association of *words*. The effort of merely verbal memory which you demand is simply wasted: you are burdening the mind to no purpose. The only catechetical instruction which is worth anything is that in which teachers and children exchange ideas in their own words; when the question rises spontaneously, and the answer is a perfectly natural one, and thus affords the true measure of the learner's knowledge. But that is not catechizing when teacher and child sit down with a book between them, and repeat alternately the words which it puts into their mouths; when both are puppets alike, the wires being pulled and the machinery managed by the unknown author of the book.

Look back a little. Does any one of us remember anything out of his catechisms? Have we not the most dreary recollections of that troublesome and tedious exercise, when teacher and child were talking and moving, so to speak, in fetters, and neither *mind* was actually in communication with the other? Why is this? I believe it is because here the merely verbal memory was required to receive what it had no business to take. There being nothing of any special value in the mere phrases of the book, the mind was yet striving rigidly and inflexibly to retain them.

Moreover, the answer to a question in a catechism is nearly always *a part of a sentence* only, the other part being contained in the question itself. Now

children are never required to learn the questions by heart; and yet, unless they do this, they may remember the answer ever so accurately, and are little or none the wiser for it. I take, for instance, an extract from the Church Catechism.

"*Q.* Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do as they have promised for thee?

"*A.* Yes, verily; and by God's help so I *will.* And I heartily thank our heavenly Father that He hath called me to *this* state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me His grace, that I may continue in the *same* unto my life's end."

Observe here that the answer, as it stands, has no meaning. "So I will" forms a very small part of the resolution which the learner is intended to make, and to remember. The gist of the whole truth intended to be taught lies in the question, and in its relation to the previous answer. Without these the answer conveys no instruction, and enforces no duty. Notice especially the words which I have put in italics, and you will see that they relate to notions which lie outside of the sentence altogether. What possible purpose can be served by the *verbatim* recollection of such a passage as this? It is a mere fragment, which even if a child carries about with him in his memory to his dying day, will remain utterly without significance to him. Yet there are good people who attach importance to the learning of these words by heart, and who go on Sunday after Sunday conscientiously labouring to teach them. I wish they would inquire a little into the actual effect produced on a child's mind by such an exercise.

The learning of the Creed or the Commandments by heart is a different thing. There the sentences are complete in themselves, and are concise *formulæ* of faith and duty; which, if remembered, will serve a definite purpose. The objection which I urge does not, of course, extend to them.

In short, catechizing ought to be a real discipline for the intelligence. It cannot be so unless the words of question and answer are spontaneous and natural. Of course, if a teacher finds a printed catechism useful, as a *text* or *basis* for his own questions, he is quite justified in employing it. But it should never be a *substitute* for such questions.

Mechanical and rational memory.

The rule for our guidance as to mere *rote* and memory work appears then to be this: When the words in which a truth is conveyed are clearly the best words, and no others will do so well, as in the case of texts of Scripture;—when there is but one possible way of saying a thing rightly, and every other way is wrong, as in the case of a date or the multiplication table;—when there is any special beauty and fitness in the words, as in the case of creeds, collects, or other formularies of devotion or of faith; poetry and choice passages from good authors;—or when extreme and minute accuracy of statement is for any reason particularly necessary, as in many of the rules, axioms, and fundamental definitions of science:—then an appeal to the mechanical faculty of retaining verbal associations is lawful and right: but in all other cases, where you want rather to educate the intelligence and develop reflection, do not make such an appeal.

Let thoughts, and facts, and events, and principles, and reasons, and explanations, be linked together by their natural affinities; let them be fastened by setting the judgment to exert itself upon them; and do not interpose the mechanical and artificial difficulty of retaining certain words between the learner and the thing which he has to learn.

For it must not be forgotten that whenever we desire children to commit words to memory, there is great danger of their overlooking the sense—taking the words, in fact, as a substitute for the sense, and memory as a substitute for thinking—and of their resting satisfied with the effort of verbal recollection which they have made. Whenever, therefore, a task of this kind is given, the words ought to have some special value, or to contain, in the most expressive and useful form, some important truth. Otherwise children are injured, and their intelligence deadened and weakened, by asking them to remember words at all.

But then, when we have once made up our minds that a certain formula of words is in itself valuable, and that the truth we want to convey cannot be well conveyed or held in the mind advantageously in any other words, let us insist on perfect accuracy in the repetition of the lesson. I am afraid we often forget this. We let a child stammer and blunder through a lesson; we help him through kindly, by occasionally suggesting a word, and feel very much relieved if he just gets to the end of his task passably, so as to save us the trouble of obliging him to learn it again. But let us ask ourselves, What is the use of such an

exercise? The only possible condition on which the learning of a thing by heart is justifiable at all is, that it be learnt thoroughly; so perfectly, indeed, that the connection of the words will be indelibly associated in the learner's mind for life, and that he shall be sure to remember them again. Now, it is quite certain that if a child says a lesson imperfectly to-day, and is yet allowed to pass it, he will not be able to say it half so well to-morrow, and will (unless he is forced to learn it again) have forgotten it entirely in a week. So all the trouble taken in the matter is absolutely lost. If you were dealing with the understanding or the judgment it would be different. It is better to understand half a truth than to be entirely ignorant of it; because that half will so expand by the operation of our own faculties, that some day we may understand the whole. But to know a thing half by heart is not a whit better than to know none of it; because when once a lesson is passed, and left in that state, it comes to nothing, it *can* come to nothing; the mind has no innate power of going on with it, or of returning to it, or even of keeping up the association which has thus been imperfectly formed. The links formed between the words drop asunder, and the whole of the labour is wasted.

It is far better to learn one verse in such a way as to remember it for life, than to learn a chapter which will be forgotten in a week. A thing is not *known* by heart if we have to pause, and reflect, and wonder what the next word is, even though we find the right word after all.

The manifest inferences from all this are: (1) that we should economize this power of learning

by heart, and should not demand too much from it; (2) that we should only use this kind of effort in the case of such words, phrases and sentences, as have in themselves some special fitness and importance; (3) that all memory lessons should be very short; and (4) that they should be said with perfect accuracy.

Practical inferences.

A question of some interest is, "How should the effort of memory be related to the effort of thinking?" Of course we want both to be made together. But suppose, for instance, I mean next Sunday to give a lesson on the duty of children to their parents: shall I give out the fifth commandment, a text or two, and a suitable hymn, to be learnt beforehand, or shall I wait till Sunday comes, give my lesson, illustrate, enforce, and explain it in the best way I can, and *then* give the text and hymn to be learnt in the week after, and said by heart, before I begin my next lesson on the following Sunday? In other words, should the effort of verbal memory be preliminary or supplementary to the explanation and understanding of the subject? Now, good teachers differ on this point, I know; and some have probably very good reasons for preferring the former plan. But all my experience leads me to prefer the latter. Moreover, it seems to me more philosophical, and more in harmony with the real requirements of our minds. When the understanding is enlightened, and the feelings interested in a matter, then there is a motive and a stimulus for the use of the memory. We are ready to remember words which relate to a subject which we understand. Besides, it is ten times

Understand first and memorize after.

easier to learn words by heart when they represent thoughts which have been explained to us, and which we know something about. It is very weary work to learn words which have no meaning to us.

So my plan would be, to give thoughts first, and technical or book words afterwards, rather than those words first, and thoughts afterwards. I believe this is a sound principle in all lessons. Even when I am teaching spelling, I would rather spell the words as they occur in a lesson, and words which are associated in the child's mind with a purpose and a meaning, than columns of isolated words, many of which are quite new, and without interest to the child, and have therefore nothing to hold by in his mind. In like manner, it is when we have given a good lesson, and brought all our resources to bear on its elucidation, that we can most effectually clench and fasten the impression which we have made by a well-chosen text of Scripture. It is when a child has been led to recognize the fulness of meaning which a particular portion of the Divine word contains, and to feel an interest in its contents, that he is most disposed to learn it by heart, and that his intellectual powers are in the fittest state for the exercise.

The cistern and the fountain.

You will have gathered from all I have said, that while I think the recollection of words a good thing, I think the recollection of the things represented by those words a much better. The former cultivates accuracy, patience, and many valuable qualities of mind; so we cannot afford to neglect it. Moreover, it stores the mind with valuable thoughts in choice language, and is thus very helpful through

life. But the latter is of more importance to the intelligence, and to the general mental growth of the learner. People of very inferior mental gifts often have a marvellous memory for little, insignificant details, and can repeat to you with great accuracy the very words of a conversation, or the precise incidents of a story, which they have once heard. "Some people, too, have been"—I say it on the authority of an eminent modern philosopher—"intellectually damaged by having a good memory for mere words. An unskilful teacher," he says, "is content to put before children all they ought to learn, and to take care that they remember it; and so, though the memory is retentive, the mind is left in a passive state. And men wonder that he who was so quick in learning and remembering should not be an able man; which is as reasonable as to wonder that a cistern, if filled, should not be a perennial fountain. . . . Many are saved by the deficiency of their memory from being spoiled by their education; for those who have no extraordinary memory are driven to supply its place by thinking. If they do not remember a mathematical demonstration, they are driven to devise one. If they do not remember what Aristotle or Bacon said, they are driven to consider what they are likely to have said, or ought to have said."

Perhaps the most solemn thought of all in connection with this subject is, that every day is adding to our memories, and, even when we notice it least, increasing the number of the manifold associations which will determine all our future thoughts and much of our future happiness. There is something or other in the history of to-day, and of every day,

which will cling to us, which will colour or give shape to our thoughts years hence, if we live, and which will contribute either to depress or to gladden, to improve or deteriorate us in days to come. Do we think of this enough? Is it in your minds when children are round you at the Sunday school, that one way or another they will have associations with your class for life? You are storing up, however unconsciously to yourselves, impressions, reflections, and memories, which will inevitably come up, again and again, in the lives of the children, possibly at their most critical stages, and with unexpected results. Whether they think of religion as a pure and lovely thing hereafter, or whether they associate it with hardness, with dulness, and with lifelessness, depends on you. Whether the investigation of Scripture truth appears to them, when men and women, as a worthy and beautiful pursuit, full of interest and meaning, and pregnant with instruction of a practical kind, or whether it seems to them a repulsive and barren occupation, to be entered upon reluctantly, conducted mechanically, and escaped from speedily, all depends on the associations formed between religion and your teaching in the Sunday school. The laws of mind *will* assert their rights; mental associations will be formed, whether you will or not; and some of them will be enduring, however little pains you take. See, then, that the Bible lessons bring to the child associations of life and of happiness; that they hereafter recall pleasant recollections of awakened intelligence, gratified curiosity, of the strivings of conscience, of the opening of the

The importance of early associations.

heart, of your accents of love and gentleness, of your winning ways, your anxious and kindly insight into his wants, your earnest desire to make truths precious to him which you had felt to be precious to yourselves. Let Bible teaching bring back to the child, in the storms of future life, a general impression of calmness and thoughtfulness, of wisdom and of rational delight; and who knows how much good may be done even by the humblest of you?

And for ourselves, too, the same thought is worth retaining. What sort of tale will to-day, and yesterday, and to-morrow have to tell to the memory of each of us in years that are to come? It *will* have something to say, be sure. Associations such as I have described have been forming, and strengthening, and deepening; hereafter they will prove either riches or poverty to us. We shall be wiser, higher, purer, in virtue of these associations: or else lower and more confirmed in ignorance. Which shall it be? I have heard of a sort of ink which makes no visible mark at first, but which comes out all black and indelible in after years. It is in this sort of writing all our doings and our thoughts are recorded from day to day by the pencil of the memory.

> "Oh that our lives, which flee so fast,
> In purity were such,
> That not an image of the past
> Should fear that pencil's touch!"

CHILDREN'S HYMNS

In Mr. Ruskin's last "Fors," he pays the following eloquent tribute to the value of children's hymns. He tells of a visit he paid to a cottage, and says: "But the dearest child of the cottage was not there. Last spring they had a little boy, full of intelligent life, a pearl of chief price to them. He went down to the field by the brookside one bright morning when his elder brother was mowing. The child came up behind without speaking, and the back sweep of the scythe caught the leg and divided a vein. His brother carried him up to the house; and what swift binding could do was done. The doctor, three miles away, coming as soon as might be, arranged all for the best, and the child lay pale and quiet till the evening, speaking sometimes a little to his father and mother. But at six in the evening he began to sing—sang on—clearer and clearer, all through the night—so clear at last, you might have heard him, his mother said, 'far out on the moor there.' Sang on till the full light of morning, and so passed away. 'Did he sing with words?' I asked. 'Oh yes; just the bits of hymns he had learnt at Sunday school.' So much of his education finally available to him, you observe. Not the multiplication

table then—these rhymes only remained to him for his last happiness. 'Happy in delirium only,' say you? All true love, all true wisdom, and all true knowledge, seem so to the world; but, without question, the forms of weakness of body preceding death, or those during life which are like them, are the testing states, often the strongest states, of the soul. And the lesson I received from that cottage history, and which I would learn with my readers, is the power for good in what, rightly chosen, has been rightly learned by heart at school, whether it show at school, whether it show at the time, or not. The hymn may be forgotten in the playground, or ineffective afterwards in restraining contrary habits of feeling and life, but all that is good and right retains its unfelt authority."

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE TAUGHT TO RUSKIN BY HIS MOTHER

Exodus 15 and 20.
II Sam. 1. 17 to end.
I Kings 8.
Psalms 23, 32, 90, 91, 103, 112, 119, 139.
Proverbs 2, 3, 8 and 12.
Isa. 58.
Matt. 5, 6 and 7.
Acts 26.
I Cor. 13 and 15.
James 4.
Revelation 5 and 6.

"This maternal installation of mind in that property of chapters, I count very confidently the most precious and on the whole the one essential part of all my education."

THE ART OF QUESTIONING

I HAVE undertaken to say a few words to you on the "Art of Questioning." It is a subject of great importance to all of you who desire to become good teachers; for, in truth, the success and efficiency of our teaching depend more on the skill and judgment with which we put questions, than on any other single circumstance.

It is very possible for a teacher in a Sunday school to be fluent in speech, earnest in manner, happy in his choice of illustration, and to be a very inefficient teacher nevertheless. We are often apt to think it enough if we *deliver* a good lesson, and to forget that, after all, its value depends upon the degree in which it is really received and appropriated by the children. Now, in order to secure that what we teach shall really enter their minds, and be duly fixed and comprehended there, it is above all things necessary that we should be able to use effectively the important instrument of instruction to which our attention is now to be drawn.

I have called Questioning an *Art*. It is so, inasmuch as it is a practical matter, and to be learnt mainly, not by talking about it, but by *doing* it. We can only become good questioners after much patient practice; and, as is the case with every other art, proficiency in this one can only be

attained by working at it, and education in it only by the teaching of experience.

But if this were all, I should not have ventured to make questioning the subject of an address to you: for the only advice appropriate in such a case would be, "go to your classes, work in them, and learn the art of questioning, *by questioning*."

The truth is, however, that there is a science of teaching as well as an art; every rule of practice which is worth anything is based on some principle; and as it is the business of every good artist to investigate the reasons for the methods he adopts, and to know something of those general laws which it is his business to put to a practical application, so it will, perhaps, be worth our while to dwell for a little on the general principles which should be kept in view in questioning, and to ascertain not only *how* a wise teacher should put questions, but *why* one way is better or worse than another.

Questions, as employed by teachers, may be divided into three classes, according to the purposes which they may be intended to serve. There is, first, the *preliminary* or *experimental* question, by which an instructor feels his way, sounds the depths of his pupil's previous knowledge, and prepares him for the reception of what it is designed to teach.

Then, secondly, there is the question employed in *actual instruction*, by means of which the thoughts of the learner are exercised, and he is compelled, so to speak, to take a share in giving himself the lesson.

Thirdly, there is the question of *examination*, by which a teacher tests his own work, after he has given a lesson, and ascertains whether it has been

soundly and thoroughly learnt. If we carefully attend to this distinction, we shall understand the meaning of the saying of a very eminent teacher, who used to say of the interrogative method, that by it he first questioned the knowledge *into* the minds of the children, and then questioned it *out* of them again.

Perhaps I can best illustrate the nature of what I have called preliminary or experimental questioning, by referring for a moment to the history of a celebrated man—an Athenian philosopher—who lived more than 2,000 years ago, but whose name and influence survive even in this age.

Socrates had the reputation of being a very great teacher, yet he never lectured nor preached. He had not even a code of doctrine or of opinion to promulgate. But he lived in the midst of a clever, cultivated, yet somewhat opinionated people, and he made it his business to question them as to the grounds of their own opinions ; and to put searching and rigid inquiries to them on points which they thought they thoroughly understood. He believed that the great impediment to true knowledge was the possession of fancied or unreal knowledge, and that the first business of a philosopher was, not to teach, but to prepare the mind of the pupil for the reception of truth by proving to him his own ignorance. This kind of mental purification he considered a good preparation for teaching ; hence he often challenged a sophist or flippant and self-confident learner with a question as to the meaning of some familiar word ; he would receive the answer, then repeat it, and put some other question intended to bring out the different senses in which the word

might be applied. It not unfrequently appeared that the definition was either too wide and included too much, or too narrow and comprehended too little. The respondent would then ask leave to retract his former definition and to amend it; and when this was done, the questioner would quietly proceed to cross-examine his pupil on the subject, applying the amended definition to special cases, until answers were given inconsistent with each other and with the previous reply. Now, as Socrates never lost sight of the main point, and had a remarkable power of chaining his hearer to the question in hand, and forbidding all discursiveness, the end of the exercise often was, that the pupil, after vain efforts to extricate himself, admitted that he could give no satisfactory answer to the question which at first seemed so easy.

I will give you a translation from one of Plato's dialogues in which this peculiar method is illustrated. There was one of the disciples of Socrates named Meno, who had been thus probed and interrogated until he felt a somewhat uncomfortable conviction that he was not so wise as he had thought; and who complained to the philosopher of what he called the merely negative character of his instruction.

"Why, Socrates," said he, "you remind me of that broad sea-fish called the torpedo, which produces a numbness in the person who approaches and touches it. For, in truth, I seem benumbed both in mind and mouth, and I know not what to reply to you, and yet I have often spoken on this subject with great fluency and success."

In reply Socrates says little, but calls to him

Meno's attendant, a young slave-boy, and begins to question him.

"My boy, do you know what figure this is?" (drawing a square upon the ground with a stick.)

"Oh yes. It is a square."

"What do you notice about these lines?" (tracing them.)

"That all four are equal."

"Could there be another space like this, only larger or less?"

"Certainly."

"Suppose this line (pointing to one of the sides) is two feet long, how many feet will there be in the whole?"

"Twice two."

"How many is that?"

"Four."

"Will it be possible to have another space twice this size?"

"Yes."

"How many square feet will it contain?"

"Eight."

"Then how long will the side of such a space be?"

"It is plain, Socrates, that it will be twice the length."

"You see, Meno, that I teach this boy nothing, I only question him. And now he thinks he knows the right answer to my question; but does he really know?"

"Certainly not," replied Meno.

"Let us return to him again."

"My boy, you say that from a line of four feet long, there will be produced a space of eight square feet; is it so?"

"Yes, Socrates, I think so."

"Let us try, then." (He prolongs the line to double the length.)

"Is this the line you mean?"

"Certainly." (He completes the square.)

"How large is become the whole space?"

"Why, it is four times as large."

"How many feet does it contain?"

"Sixteen."

"How many ought double the square to contain?"

"Eight."

After a few more questions the lad suggests that the line should be three feet long; since four feet are too much.

"If, then, it be three feet, we will add the half of the first line to it, shall we?"

"Yes." (He draws the whole square on a line of three feet.)

"Now, if the first square we drew contained twice two feet, and the second four times four feet, how many does the last contain?"

"Three times three, Socrates."

"And how many ought it to contain?"

"Only eight, or one less than nine."

"Well now, since this is not the line on which to draw the square we wanted, tell me how long it should be."

"Indeed, Sir, I don't know."

"Now observe, Meno, what has happened to this boy; you see he did not know at first, neither does he yet know. But he then answered boldly, because he fancied he knew, now he is quite at a loss; and though he is still as ignorant as before, he does not think he knows."

Meno replies, "What you say is quite true, Socrates."

"Is he not, then, in a better state now in respect to the matter of which he was ignorant?"

"Most assuredly he is."

"In causing him to be thus at a loss, and in benumbing him like a torpedo, have we done him any harm?"

"None, certainly."

"We have at least made some progress towards finding out his true position. For now, knowing nothing, he is more likely to inquire and search for himself."

Now I think those of us who are Sunday school teachers can draw a practical hint or two from this anecdote. If we want to prepare the mind to receive instruction, it is worth while first to find out what is known already, and what foundation or substratum of knowledge there is on which to build; to clear away misapprehensions and obstructions from the mind on which we wish to operate; and to excite curiosity and interest on the part of the learners as to the subject which it is intended to teach. For, "Curiosity," as Archbishop Whateley says, "is the parent of attention; and a teacher has no more right to expect success in teaching those who have no curiosity to learn, than a husbandman has who sows a field without ploughing it."

It is chiefly by questions judiciously put to a child before you give him a lesson, that you will be able to kindle this curiosity, to make him feel the need of your instruction, and bring his intellect into a wakeful and teachable condition. Whatever you may have to give in the way of new knowledge will

then have a far better chance of being understood and remembered. For you may take it as a rule in teaching, that the mind always refuses to receive —certainly to retain—any isolated knowledge. We remember only those facts and principles which link themselves with what we knew before, or with what we hope to know or are likely to want hereafter. Try, therefore, to establish, in every case, a logical connection between what you teach and what your pupils knew before. Make your new information a sort of development of the old, the expansion of some germ of thought or inquiry which lay hid in the child's mind before. Seek to bring to light what your pupil already possesses, and you will then always see your way more clearly to a proper adaptation of your teaching to his needs.

The questioning of instruction.

I said that there were two other purposes which might be served by questioning, besides that which I have just described. It may serve the purpose of actual instruction in the course of giving a lesson, and it may also be the means of examining and testing the pupils after the lesson is finished. Some teachers seem to think that this last is the only use of questioning; but, in truth, it is as a means of deepening and fixing truth upon the mind that it possesses the highest value. Hence, every fact you teach, before you proceed to another, ought generally to be made the subject of interrogation.

I will suppose that most of the instruction which you are in the habit of giving in a Sunday school is connected with Scripture reading lessons. The usual plan is, to let a certain portion of the Word of God be read, verse by verse, in turns by the

children of the class, then to cause the books to be closed, and then to proceed to question on the lesson. Now, in my own classes in a Sunday school, I have generally found that the mere mechanical difficulty of reading, and the fact that so much of the phraseology of the Bible is unfamiliar and antiquated, were sufficient to prevent the lesson from being understood by all the children. So, if I reserved my questions until the end, it has often happened that many important truths of the lesson proved to have been overlooked by the children, and the result of the questioning has been most unsatisfactory. To remedy this, the best plan seems to be, to put brief, pointed questions during the reading, to take care that no difficult or peculiar words pass unexplained, and constantly to arrest the attention of the class when it flags, by inquiries addressed to individual members of it. You will also find it a good plan, especially with the younger children, after the whole lesson has been read twice or thrice by the class, to read a short passage yourself, generally two or three verses, in a slow, distinct manner, with as much expression as possible, and then question thoroughly upon the passage, exhausting its meaning before you go on to the next. When this has been done with each successive portion of the lesson, the books may be closed, and the whole recapitulated by way of examination. You will find this plan answer a double purpose : it will improve the reading of the class, by giving to it a model of clearness and expression, and it will enable you to question systematically on every fact you teach as soon as you have taught it. By thus making sure of your ground

as you proceed, you will become entitled to expect answers to your recapitulatory or examination questions; and this is a point of great importance, for nothing discourages and depresses a teacher more, or sooner destroys the interest of the children in a lesson, than the asking of questions which they cannot answer.

Thus the advantage of questioning on each portion of a lesson, rigidly and carefully as it is learnt, is that you then have a *right* to demand full answers to all your testing questions when the lesson is concluded. You will, of course, go over the ground a second time much more rapidly than at first, but it is always desirable to cover the whole area of your subject in recapitulation, and to put questions at the end to every child in your class.

I have only one other observation to make as to the distinction to be kept in view between the questioning of instruction and the questioning of examination. In the former it is often wise to use the simultaneous method, and to address your question to the whole class. This kind of collective exercise gives vigour and life to a lesson, and the sympathy which is always generated by numbers helps to strengthen and fix the impression you wish to convey. But you must never be satisfied with simultaneous answers; they should invariably be followed up by individual questioning, or they will prove very misleading. It may seem a paradoxical assertion, but it is nevertheless true, that a group of children may appear intelligent, while the separate members of the group are careless, ignorant, or only half interested. Without intending to deceive, children soon learn to catch the

key-note of a word or a sentence from their fellows, and to practise many little artifices by which knowledge and attention are simulated, and by which a very slight degree of interest may be mistaken by their teacher for sound and thoughtful work. So, while you will often call for collective answers in order to maintain the vivacity and spirit of your lesson, you should always suspect such answers; and in every case let them be succeeded by individual appeals to separate children, especially to those who appear the least attentive. Of course, the recapitulatory or examination questions should be entirely individual; in a small class the questions may well be put to each child in turn, but in a large one they should be given promiscuously; so that every learner may feel sure that he will be personally challenged, and find no cloak for his own ignorance.

The qualities of good questions.

But, leaving for the present all distinctions as to the purposes which questions may at different times be made to serve, let us fix our attention on some points which should be kept in view as to the language, style, and character of all questions whatever.

First, then, *cultivate great simplicity of language.* Use as few words as possible, and let them be such as are adapted to the age and capacity of the class you are teaching. Remember that questions are not meant to display your own learning or acquirements, but to bring out those of the children. It is a great point in questioning, to say as little as possible, and so to say that little as to cause the children to say as much as possible. Conduct your lesson in such a way, that if a visitor or

superintendent be standing by, his attention will be directed, not to you, but to your pupils ; and his admiration excited, not by *your* skill and cleverness, but by the amount of mental activity displayed on their part.

There is an old Latin maxim which, translated, means, "It is the business of art to conceal art." I suppose this means that in the case of all the highest and noblest arts, their results are spoilt by any needless display of mechanism, or any obtrusive manifestation of the artist's personal gifts. At any rate you may take it for granted, in relation to your art, that the best questioning is that which attracts least attention to the questioner, and makes the learners seem to be the most important parties concerned. You will do well, therefore, to practise yourselves in using great plainness of speech, and in constructing questions in the fewest possible words.

Connected with this is another hint of importance : *do not tell much in your questions.* Never, if you can help it, communicate a fact in your question. Contrive to educe every fact from the class. It is better to pause for a moment, and to put one or two subordinate questions, with a view to bring out the truth you are seeking, than to tell anything which the children could tell you. A good teacher never conveys information in the form of a question. If he tells his class something, he is not long before he makes the class tell him the same thing again; but his question never assumes the same form, or employs the same phraseology as his previous statement; for if it does the form of the question really suggests the

answer, and the exercise fails to challenge the judgment and memory of the children as it ought to do. I may, for instance, want to bring out the fact that Jerusalem is the chief city in the Holy Land. Now suppose I do it thus:—"What is the chief city in the Holy Land?" "Jerusalem." "In what country is Jerusalem, the chief city?" "The Holy Land." Here each question carries with it the answer to the other, and the consequence is that they serve scarcely any useful purpose.

For this reason it is always important, in questioning on a passage of Scripture, to avoid using the words of Scripture; otherwise we may greatly deceive ourselves as to the real extent of knowledge possessed by the class. I will suppose, for example, that you are giving a lesson on the meaning of the Christian injunction, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and that the class has first been questioned as to the meaning of it, and proved unable to give a full and satisfactory explanation of the scope and meaning of these memorable words. The parable of the good Samaritan has been chosen as the illustrative reading lesson. It has been read twice or thrice by the class in turn, and then the teacher takes the first verse and reads it slowly to the class.

An example.

"*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*"—Luke x. 30.

Some teachers would proceed to question thus:

Who is this parable about? *A certain man.* Where did he go from? *Jerusalem.* Where to?

Jericho. What sort of people did he fall among? *Thieves.* What did they do with his raiment? *Stripped him of it.* What did they do with the man himself? *Wounded him.* In what state did they leave him? *Half dead.*

Observe here that the teacher has covered the whole area of the narrative, and proposed a question on every fact; so far he has done well. But it is to be noticed that every question was proposed as nearly as possible in the words of the book, and required for its answer one (generally *but* one) of those words. Now it is very easy for a boy or girl, while the echoes of the Bible narrative just read still linger in the ear, to answer every such question by rote merely, with scarcely any effort of memory, and no effort of thought whatever. It is very possible to fill up the one remaining word of such elliptical sentences as those which have just been used as questions without having any perception at all of the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

So, if you desire to secure a thorough understanding of the sacred narrative, it will be necessary to propose questions constructed on a different model, avoiding the use of the exact phraseology of Scripture, and requiring for answers other words than those contained in the narrative.

Let us go over the same subject again, first introducing it by one or two preliminary questions; e.g.:

Who used these words?

To whom were they spoken?

Why were they uttered?

Repeat the question which the lawyer asked.

What is the parable about? (Various answers.) One says, *A man who went on a journey.* What do you call a man who goes on a journey? *A traveller.* In what country was the man travelling? *Judæa.* Let us trace his route on the map.

In what direction was he travelling? *Eastward.* Through what kind of country? (Here the teacher's own information should supply a fact or two about its physical features.) What should you suppose from the lesson was the state of the country at that time? *Thinly peopled; Road unfrequented, &c., &c.* How do you know this? *Because he fell among thieves.* Give another expression for "fell among." *Happened to meet with.* Another word for "thieves." *Robbers.* How did the robbers treat this traveller? *They stripped him of his raiment.* What does the word raiment mean? *Clothes.* Besides robbing him of his clothes, what else did they do? *Wounded him.* Explain that word. *Injured him, Hurt him very much, &c., &c.* How do you know from the text that he was much hurt? *They left him half dead. They almost killed him.*

Now observe here that the aim has been two-fold. First—not to suggest the answer by the form of the question. Hence another sort of language has been adopted, and the children have therefore been made to interpret the Biblical language into that of ordinary life. Secondly—not to be satisfied with single words as answers, especially with the particular word which is contained in the narrative itself, but always to *translate* it into one more familiar. Children can often give the word which suffices to answer their teacher's

inquiry, and are yet ignorant of the whole statement of which that word forms a part. After going over verses like these in detail, I should recommend varying the form of the question, thus:

"Now what have we learnt in this verse?"

"That there was a traveller going from the chief city of Judæa, to another town near the Jordan, on the north-east."

"Well, and what happened to him?"

"That he was robbed and half killed; and left very weak and helpless."

A teacher ought not, in fact, to be satisfied until he can get entire sentences for answers. These sentences will generally be paraphrases of the words used in the lesson, and the materials for making the paraphrases will have been developed in the course of the lesson, by demanding, in succession, meanings and equivalents for all the principal words. Remember that the mere ability to fill up a parenthetical or elliptical sentence, proves nothing beyond the possession of a little tact, and verbal memory. It is worth while often to turn round sharply on some inattentive member of the class, or upon some one who has just given a mechanical answer, with the question, "What have we just said?" "Tell me what we have just learnt about such a person?" Observe that the answer required to such a question must necessarily be a whole sentence; it will be impossible to answer it, without a real effort of thought and of judgment in the selection of the learner's words, and without an actual acquaintance with the fact which has been taught.

It is of great importance, also, that questions

should be *definite* and *unmistakable*, and, for the most part, that they admit of but one answer. An unskilful teacher puts vague, wide questions, such as, "What did he do?" "What did Abraham say?" "How did Joseph feel at such a time?" "What lesson ought we to learn from this?"—questions to which no doubt *he* sees the right answer, because it is already in his mind; but which, perhaps, admit of several equally good answers, according to the different points of view from which different minds would look at them. He does not think of this; he fancies that what is so clear to him ought to be equally clear to others; he forgets that the minds of the children may be moving on other rails, so to speak, even though directed to the same object. So, when an answer comes which was not the one he expected, even though it is a perfectly legitimate one, he rejects it; while, if any child is fortunate enough to give the precise answer which was in the teacher's mind, he is commended and rewarded, even though he has exerted no more thought on the subject.

Vague and indefinite questions, I have always observed, produce three different results, according to the class of children to whom they are addressed. The really thoughtful and sensible boy is simply bewildered by them. He is very anxious to be right, but he is not clear as to what answer his teacher expects; so he is silent, looks puzzled, and is, perhaps, mistaken for a dunce. The bold and confident boy who does not think, when he hears a vague question, answers at random; he is not quite sure whether he is right or wrong, but he tries the experiment, and is thus strengthened in a

habit of inaccuracy, and encouraged in the mischievous practice of guessing. There is a third class of children whom I have noticed, not very clever, but sly and knowing nevertheless, who watch the teacher's peculiarities, know his methods, and soon acquire the knack of observing the structure of his sentences, so as to find out which answer he expects. They do not understand the subject so well, perhaps, as many others, but they understand the teacher better, and can more quickly pronounce the characteristic word, or the particular answer he expects. Now I do not hesitate to say, that as far as real education and development of thought are concerned, each of these three classes of children is injured by the habit of vague, wide, and ambiguous questioning, which is so common among teachers.

For similar reasons it is generally necessary to abstain from giving questions to which we have no reasonable right to expect an answer. Technical terms, and information children are not likely to possess, ought not to be demanded. Nor should questions be repeated to those who cannot answer. A still more objectionable practice is that of suggesting the first word or two of a sentence, or pronouncing the first syllable of a word which the children do not recollect. All these errors generate a habit of guessing among the scholars, and we should ever bear in mind, that there is no one habit more fatal to accurate thinking, or more likely to encourage shallowness and self-deception than this. It should be discountenanced in every possible way; and the most effective way is to study well the form of our questions, to consider

well whether they are quite intelligible and unequivocal to those to whom they are addressed, and to limit them to those points on which we have a right to expect clear and definite answers.

There is a class of questions which hardly deserve the name, and which are apparent but not true questions. I mean those which simply require the answer "Yes" or "No." Nineteen such questions out of twenty carry their own answers in them; for it is almost impossible to propose one, without revealing, by the tone and inflection of the voice, the kind of answer you expect. For example—"Is it right to honour our parents?" "Did Abraham show much faith when he offered up his son?" "Do you think the author of the Psalms was a good man?" "Were the Pharisees really lovers of truth?" Questions like these elicit no thought whatever; there are but two possible answers to each of them, and of these I am sure to show, by my manner of putting the question, which one I expect. Such questions should, therefore, as a general rule be avoided, as they seldom serve any useful purpose, either in teaching or examining. For every question, it must be remembered, ought to require an effort to answer it; it may be an effort of memory, or an effort of imagination, or an effort of judgment, or an effort of perception; it may be a considerable effort or it may be a slight one; but it must be an effort; and a question which challenges no mental exertion whatever, and does not make the learner think, is worth nothing. Hence, however such simple affirmative and negative replies may look like work, they may co-exist with utter stagnation

Fictitious questions.

of mind on the part of the scholars, and with complete ignorance of what we are attempting to teach.

So much for the *language* of questioning. But it is worth while to give a passing notice to the order and *arrangement* of questions. They should, in fact, always follow one another in systematic order; each should seem to grow out of the answer which preceded it, and should have a clear logical connection with it. Much of the force and value of the Interrogative Method is lost in a loose, unconnected, random set of inquiries, however well they may be worded, or however skilfully each separate question may be designed to elicit the thought and knowledge of the learners. If the entire impression left on the mind of the learner is to be an effective one, all that he has learnt on a given subject ought to be coherent and connected. We cannot secure this without acquiring a habit of continuous and orderly questioning, so that each effort of thought made by the scholar shall be duly connected with the former, and preparatory to the next. There will thus be a unity and entireness in the teaching, and what is taught will then have a reasonable chance of a permanent place in the memory. For we must ever remember that whatever is learnt confusedly, is remembered confusedly, and that all effective teaching must be characterized by system and continuity. Hence, in proposing questions, it is very necessary to keep in view the importance of linking them together, of making each new answer the solution of some difficulty, which the former answer suggested but did not explain, and

Orderly questioning.

of arranging all questions in the exact order in which the subject would naturally develop itself in the mind of a logical and systematic thinker.

A very good example of this peculiar merit in questioning may be found in the Church Catechism, especially in its latter section. I do not recommend the practice of teaching from Catechisms, and I do not of course enter here on any controversy respecting the subject matter of this one; but the arrangement of the questions will certainly repay an attentive examination. Look at that portion which relates to the sacraments. It will be found that each answer serves to suggest the next question, and that the whole body of answers, in the order in which they stand, furnish a systematic code of doctrine on the subject to which the Catechism refers, with every fact in precisely its right place. The excellence of the method adopted will be best understood by contrasting it with many popular modern works in a catechetical form.

We have often been struck, I dare say, in reading the newspapers, to find what plain and sensible evidence the witnesses all appear to give at judicial trials. We recognize the name of some particular person, and we know, perhaps, that he is an uneducated man, apt to talk in an incoherent and desultory way on most subjects, utterly incapable of telling a simple story without wandering and blundering, and very nervous withal; yet if he happens to have been a witness at a trial, and we read the published report of his testimony, we are surprised to find what a connected, straightforward story it is; there is no irrelevant or needless matter introduced, and yet not one significant fact is

omitted. We wonder how such a man could have stood up in a crowded court, and narrated facts with all this propriety and good taste. But the truth is, that the witness is not entitled to your praise. He never recited the narrative in the way implied by the newspaper report. But he stood opposite to a man who had studied the art of questioning; and he replied in succession to a series of interrogations which the barrister proposed to him. The reporter for the press has done no more than copy down, in the exact order in which they were given, all the replies to these questions; and if the sum of these replies reads to us like a consistent narrative, it is because the lawyer knew how to marshal his facts beforehand, had the skill to determine what was necessary and what was not necessary to this case in hand, and to propose his questions so as to draw out, even from a confused and bewildered mind, a coherent statement of facts. We may take a hint, I think, from the practice of the bar in this respect; and, especially in questioning by way of examination, we may remember that the answers of the children, if they could be taken down at the moment, ought to form a complete, orderly, and clear summary of the entire contents of the lesson.

Of course, I do not mean to insist roo rigidly to an adherence to this rule. Misconceptions will reveal themselves in the course of the lesson, which will require to be corrected; hard words will occur which need explanation; new trains of thought and inquiry will seem to start out of the lesson, and to demand occasional digression: it will, in fact, often become necessary to deviate a little to the right

hand or to the left from the main path, for the sake of illustration, and for other good reasons. No good teacher allows himself to be so enslaved by a mechanical routine as to neglect these things; we must not attempt, even for the sake of logical consistency, to adhere too rigidly to a formal series of questions, nor refuse to notice any new fact or inquiry which seems to spring naturally out of the subject. Still, the main purpose of the whole lesson should be kept steadily in view; all needless digression should be carefully avoided, and any incidental difficulties which are unexpectedly disclosed in the lesson should rather be remembered and reserved for future investigation, than permitted to beguile a teacher into a neglect of the primary truths.

A good deal of the success of a teacher depends upon the *manner* in which questions are proposed. Perhaps the most important requisite under this head is *animation*. Slow, dull, heavy questioning wearies children, and destroys their interest in a lesson. It is by a rapid succession of questions, by a pleasing and spirited manner, by dexterously challenging all who seem inattentive, and, above all, by an earnest feeling of interest in the subject, and of delight in seeing the minds of his scholars at work, that the teacher will best kindle their mental activity, and give life and force to his subject. Hence, it is necessary to avoid long pauses, and all monotony of voice, or sluggishness of manner; to vary the phraseology of your questions, and to seek in every way to kindle interest and enthusiasm about the lesson. But in doing this

The manner of questioning.

let us remember that we cannot give more than we possess; we cannot raise the minds of others above the level of our own; and therefore it is important that our manner should show a warm interest in the subject, and that our own love for sacred truth should be so strong as to convey itself, by the mere force of sympathy, into the hearts of those whom we undertake to instruct. I have seen teachers whose cheeks glowed, and whose manner became suffused with earnestness as they spoke the words of healing and of life: I have seen their eyes glisten with tearful joy as one little one after another had his intellect awakened to receive the truth, and his heart touched with sacred impressions. And I have known well that these were teachers who, whatever their intellectual gifts might be, were the most likely persons to obtain an entrance into the hearts of children, to exercise a right influence over them, and to find, after many days, that the seed they had thus sown in hope and fear had been watered by the Divine favour and benediction, and brought forth rich and glorious fruit. Of course, we must not counterfeit an emotion which we do not feel, nor use an earnest manner as a mere trick of art, or as a machine for making our teaching effective; but a Sunday school teacher will never be worth much, unless his own heart kindles at the thought of the permanence and preciousness of the truths he has to teach, nor unless he feels a positive pleasure in witnessing every new proof of the unfolding of mind on the part of his class. Such feelings are sure to give vigour to his teaching, a vivid and picturesque character to his illustrations, earnestness to his manner, animation to his voice,

and a quick, active, and telling character to his method of questioning.

For these reasons I think it very undesirable for a teacher to use a book of questions, or to have teaching notes in his hand while he gives the lesson. The value of such assistance is great, if you avail yourselves of it *beforehand;* if it helps to systematize your own thoughts, and prepare you for the right development of the lesson. But in the presence of the children the use of the question book has a chilling and depressing effect; it destroys their confidence in their teacher, it prevents him from feeling at his ease, and it gives a sluggish and mechanical look to the whole proceeding. Whether our questions be good or bad it is quite certain that they should be *our own*, not read out of a book, or from notes, but growing spontaneously out of our own minds, and adapted not only to the peculiar character and requirements of the class, but also to the time and circumstances, to the special turn which the lesson has chanced to take, and to the particular inferences which the teacher feels it most important to draw from it.

Questions should be the teacher's own.

For it must ever be one of the first requisites in all good teaching, that the minds of the teacher and the taught should come into actual contact. The words of some one else, read or quoted to me, never can have half the force of the actual utterance of a living present being, whose own thought seeks entrance into my mind, and is intended specially to meet my needs. We all know the difference between reading a sermon to children, and delivering orally a far inferior address, but one attended

with gestures and looks and tones which prove its genuineness, and give it directness of application. The same difference is noticeable in questioning, and therefore I think it far better that a teacher should make a few blunders and inaccuracies while he is educating himself into the habit of independent questioning, than that he should be rigidly exact and careful by the help of notes or books. Swimming with corks is not, strictly speaking, swimming at all; and so the reading of certain inquiries from a Catechism or a book is not, in fact, questioning at all, but an indirect and very inefficient substitute for it.

Perhaps it may be worth while to say a word or two about the answers which questions may receive.

Right and wrong answers.

We ought not to be satisfied with obtaining a right answer from one child, nor even from the whole class collectively. In most cases it is necessary to repeat a question which has been answered, to some other child who may have appeared inattentive. And if a question is first given to one who fails to answer it, and then to another boy or girl who gives the right answer, it is generally a good plan to go back to the first child, and put the same question again, in order to test his attention to what is going on in the class. We can only secure a hold upon the more indolent scholars by making each one feel that he cannot possibly escape, but that his own personal knowledge of the subject is sure to be challenged at the close of the lesson. Hence, all questions should be well distributed throughout the class, and no one child should be allowed to avoid the frequent appeals of his teacher.

Wrong answers will often be given, yet these should never make us angry, but should be reserved for a while, and shown to be incorrect by subsequent examination. Of course, if random or foolish answers are offered, it is a proof that the discipline of the class is bad, and the offence must be regarded as a breach of rule, and treated accordingly. But a mistake arising from ignorance ought never to be treated as a crime. A teacher may meet it by saying, "Will some one tell me why that answer is a wrong one?" Or, if the answer is very wide of the mark, by saying, "We will go into that presently;" or, "We will have a lesson on that subject, and you will then see why the answer was a bad one." And, in the very numerous cases in which an answer is partly wrong and partly right, or in which an answer, though right in substance, is wrong in the mere language or form of expression, it is always desirable to alter the language of your question, to propose it again to an elder child, to add a subordinate question or two to disentangle the precise truth, and then at last the question should be repeated in its original form, and an amended answer be required. But all this implies patience and judgment; a condescension to the weakness and obscurity of infant minds; a considerate, forbearing tone; and a constant desire to sympathize in their difficulties, rather by offering a friendly help in escaping from them, than by solving them at once.

It may occasionally happen to a teacher to be much vexed and puzzled because he can obtain no answers to his questions at all, or because all the answering comes from one or two prominent

children. In such cases it is needless to find fault, or to complain and scold for the inattention. It is far better to look into ourselves, and see if we cannot find the reason *there* for our want of success. Perhaps we have allowed the lesson to proceed in disorder, and nothing is known, simply because nothing has been taught; and in this case our own method is in fault. Or, perhaps, we have been asking questions above the comprehension of the children, which they are positively unable to answer, and which we have no right to ask. Or, it may be that we have put our questions in an indistinct or unintelligible way. Let us always, in case of failure, suspect ourselves, take the ignorance of the children as a censure upon our own methods, and endeavour, with God's blessing, to turn the experience of such a lesson to good account, by rectifying our plans, simplifying our language, or studying more thoroughly the nature of the child.

Mutual questions.

Occasionally it will be found advantageous to vary the exercise by the employment of mutual questions; by setting the children, especially of an upper class, to question one another in turn on the subject of the lesson. They will be very shy and unwilling to do this at first, but after a little practice they will learn to like it, and in the act of framing questions, their own intelligence will be greatly strengthened. Lord Bacon said "that a wise question is the half of knowledge;" and it is quite true that it takes some knowledge of a subject to enable us to put a good question upon it; such mutual interrogation as I have described will therefore

be, in a double sense, a test of the knowledge and thoughtfulness of a class.

Every encouragement should always be offered to the children to put questions to their teacher, and to give free expression to whatever difficulties or doubts may be in their minds. A good teacher will never think such questions irksome or out of place, but will welcome them and all the trouble they may bring with them, as so many proofs that the minds of his pupils are at work, and so many hopeful guarantees of future success.

For, indeed, the whole sum of what may be said about questioning is comprised in this. It ought to set the learners thinking, to promote activity and energy on their parts, and to arouse the whole mental faculty into action instead of blindly cultivating the memory at the expense of the higher intellectual powers. That is the best questioning which best stimulates action on the part of the learner; which gives him a habit of thinking and inquiring for himself; which tends in a great measure to render him independent of his teacher; which makes him, in fact, rather a skilful finder than a patient receiver of truth. All our questioning should aim at this; and the success of our teaching must ever be measured, not by the amount of information we have imparted, but by the degree in which we have strengthened the judgment and enlarged the capacity of our pupils, and imparted to them that searching and inquiring spirit, which is a far surer basis for all future acquisitions than any amount of mere information whatever.

I do not like to conclude without travelling a

little beyond my province, and expressing to you my entire sympathy with the motive and the object which draw you together in this place. It is pleasant to know that I am surrounded by persons who are accustomed, for the love they bear to their Lord and Master, to devote their Sunday's leisure to the work of nurturing and tending the lambs of His wandering flock. I wish that by any words of mine I knew how to encourage you in this wise and Christian course. I wish I could convey to you a stronger sense of the deep responsibility involved in the work you have undertaken. Few thoughts ought to weigh more heavily on the mind of the Sunday school teacher than the consideration of the seriousness and difficulty of the work he has undertaken to do. In many cases it is true that all the influences which are brought to bear upon the minds and hearts of the children out of school are positively hostile to your teaching. They come to you often from disorderly, ill-managed, and ungodly homes, to spend a brief hour in your class. You are their chief religious instructors. It is while they are with you, and only then, that many of them come into contact with the realities of an unseen world. It is from you only that they learn the name of God and of his Son, our Saviour, and it is you that must shape their first, and therefore their most enduring conceptions of sacred truth, of the beauty of holiness, the examples of saints and martyrs, the hatefulness of sin, the purity and glory and blessedness of heaven. That brief hour spent in your class is the one bright and hopeful spot in the history of many a child,

The importance of the teacher's work.

who, from his birth, is called to wander in strange paths, and who comes to you in, perhaps, a desultory and uncertain way for a few weeks, returning every Sunday into the midst of associations and pursuits, every one of which is positively antagonistic to religious impressions, and tends to neutralize all your teaching.

This is a solemn thought, and one which, I doubt not, has been often present to your minds, but the practical conclusions from it are very simple. How necessary it is to turn every moment of that precious time to the best possible account! How important it is to avail ourselves of every method and of every suggestion, however humble, by means of which the time can be economized and our teaching be made more effective! If the professional teacher, who devotes every day of the week to his work, who undertakes to give instruction in far meaner subjects than you teach, and who can count on far more aid and sympathy from the parents, needs to study the theory of his art, how much more necessary it is for you, with the sacred oracles of God in your hands, to apply every power and faculty you possess to the task of explaining those oracles in the best manner. It is a great mistake to suppose that religious instruction can be given more easily than secular. The truth is just the reverse. More teaching power, more judgment, and riper knowledge are required in order to teach the Holy Scriptures well than to teach anything else. You could not hope to teach grammar or mathematics by merely liking the subject and feeling an interest in it. You would find it necessary to study it systematically,

to search other books, which would throw any light on the text-book you used, and, more than all, to find out what were the best methods of presenting the subject to the mind of the learner, and the most effectual way of fixing it in his memory. And no one has a right to expect success as a teacher of God's Word on any easier condition. Story and parable, psalm and prophecy, precept and doctrine, all require to be well studied before we attempt to teach them. We dishonour the Bible and its divine Author too, when we attempt to give an unstudied and unprepared lesson on its sacred verities. Whatever elucidation history and science, or the comments of wise men, can bring to bear on the sacred Word, ought to be thankfully welcomed. We cannot afford to dispense with any aid by which our own grasp of the Scriptures can be strengthened, and our conception of the truth enlarged. And, to the end that you may enter your class rightly armed and equipped for the discharge of your Sunday duties, I know no means more wise and practical than Training Classes where model lessons, criticisms, and friendly discussion improve the teacher's skill and increase his knowledge of educational methods.

I believe that if, in addition to patient private study of the Holy Scriptures, a teacher will resolutely make use of these advantages—if he combines a due and reverent sense of the importance of his office, with a modest estimate of his own personal qualifications for it—if he carries with him the constant recollection that there is not a little child in his class, however dull, however poor, however uninteresting, who

has not that within him which will survive even the brightest star in the firmament of heaven —and if, all the while, he remembers who is the Master whom he is called to serve, and whose words they are which he undertakes to explain—he will have a right to expect success in his work. Day by day, as he studies the Bible, God will be lifting up for him the veil of difficulty which at first seemed to conceal its truths; and Sunday by Sunday the Great Teacher will seem to be aiding and strengthening him, giving him increased happiness in his work, greater personal influence over the minds of the children, and greater skill in imparting a knowledge of that Word, "the entrance of which giveth light and understanding to the simple."

TRAINING CLASSES:
THEIR WORK AND LIMITATIONS

THERE are two classes of qualifications needed in order to make an accomplished and successful teacher. In the first are included an interest in the subject taught, a love for the work of teaching, and an earnest desire to promote the highest interests of the learners. To the second belong mental vigour and flexibility, insight into character, knowledge of methods, ability to adapt them to new circumstances, and the many nameless resources which contribute to make up tact, skill, and teaching power. The former are the moral qualities which supply the *animus* or motive force of the instrument; the latter are the intellectual and mechanical gifts by which this moral force is applied and made to produce the desired results. As a body the Sunday school teachers of England possess the former class of qualifications in a very high degree. They have earnestness, zeal, a strong personal conviction of the truths they have undertaken to teach, and a most sincere interest in the spiritual welfare of the children. But it is not unfair to say that they are generally deficient in method, and

The need for training

have little acquaintance with teaching as an art. Hence, their resources are seldom economized, much of their time is misappropriated, and well-intended effort often produces little result.

There can be no question that the qualities which belong to the first class are of infinitely higher importance than those of the second. Nothing can ever compensate for the absence of them. No impression can ever be made on a child's heart or conscience by a teacher who is without them. Yet it is somewhat humbling to find how little effect is produced by the higher kind of qualifications unless they are supplemented by the lower. Piety, affection, and knowledge of scriptural truth prove of small avail when their possessors are destitute of the power of communicating knowledge, and of making their influence actually reach the children's hearts. The knowledge of the principles of teaching, though the inferior requirement, is an absolutely indispensable one. Till it is attained, the agency of Sunday school teachers will continue unsatisfactory in character, uncertain of aim, and comparatively barren of results. A large and enthusiastic army has been brought into the field; but it is undrilled; it is full of young recruits; it lacks discipline and tactical skill. Thus its effective power is diminished, and its victories are delayed.

and for training classes.

The teachers' training classes, initiated by the Sunday School Union, were formed expressly to meet this deficiency. They were not designed to do *all* the work necessary to prepare men and women to become good teachers. They can never communicate the

highest motives nor supersede the necessity for much private reading and preparation. But they can, with the divine blessing, do a most important work, and it behoves their members to consider well—especially now that the novelty of the institution has worn off—what it is that a training class can do for them, and what it is which it cannot do. For it is inevitable, and perhaps not undesirable, that the most efficient teachers will, after a short time, cease to attend weekly meetings for the study of methods and the criticism of model lessons, and will feel that the best preparation for their Sunday teaching will be conducted at home. No disappointment ought, therefore, to be felt if the meetings of such classes are less fully attended than at first, and if it should be found necessary to meet less frequently than before. But I am sure that, if well conducted, a training class may be made a *permanent institution* in every moderately-sized district, and that young teachers should be especially urged to join it, and to continue members until they shall have acquired a respectable knowledge of methods and shall evince a certain amount of teaching skill.

A model training class

But, in order that a training class shall be placed upon an enduring basis, two or three conditions deserve to be kept in mind.

Its aim should be rather to afford assistance in the *art* of teaching than to furnish the subject matter of instruction. This is all it can do effectively, and it should not profess to do more. Every teacher should feel himself personally responsible for obtaining

should deal with the art of teaching;

the right information to present to his scholars. No training class can or ought to relieve him from this responsibility.

Its meetings should not be too numerous. A demand for very frequent attendance often defeats its own purpose. Every member should feel that he or she belongs to a class, and is bound to attend every time that it meets; and it is important that such arrangements should be made as to render this not only possible but convenient to all concerned.

Again: the course of instruction given in it should be *systematic*. A desultory, unconnected series of conversations and lectures on the various aspects of the Sunday school work will not suffice to keep the class together. A certain period (say of a year or two years, according to the resources and needs of the class) should be fixed as the period of a complete course of instruction. The subjects of the lessons, essays, and discourses should be arranged beforehand, and should comprehend the main truths and principles of the science of teaching, regularly graduated in a progressive form. After all, it must be remembered that the number of such truths and practical rules as bear upon the Sunday school work is comparatively limited, and that continual novelty and originality are not needed so much as the thorough comprehension and mastery of a few fundamental principles. The same course might therefore be repeated in a new session with but little variation.

should give systematic instruction.

The nature and limits of the course must necessarily be determined by local circumstances,

by the time teachers have at their disposal, and by the amount of knowledge they possess. The following, however, appear indispensable requisites in all circumstances:

Courses of study.

I. Lectures on the theory of education as applied to Sunday school work. Among the subjects may be mentioned, Discipline, Methods of Explanation, Illustration, The Teaching of Infants, The Collective and Simultaneous Methods, Arrangement and Organization of Classes, Interrogation, Home Lessons, Reading, Rewards and Punishments, Personal Habits and Example of the Teacher, and his Influence with Parents. There are many points, too, of a more abstract character, in connection with mental and moral science, which especially deserve the investigation of teachers; such as Association of Ideas, Conception, The Will, The Judgment, The Memory, The Senses, The Imagination, and the best means of availing ourselves of each faculty and directing its exercise. Lectures on these and kindred topics will be found of very great value; and if the members habitually take and preserve their notes, and if each lecture is followed by a practical discussion, in which the experience of the members is well compared and analyzed, the value of the lectures will be greatly enhanced.

II. Well-selected readings from the best works on education will form an admirable appendage to such lectures, and, in cases where lectures are not easily obtained, a not ineffective substitute for them. But they should not only be read, but studied; not only discussed, but exhausted; and it should be constantly borne in mind that no

knowledge of *general* principles is worth anything to a teacher unless he can perceive their *particular* application to his own duties and the wants of his own class. Few good books on pedagogy have been written with any special reference to Sunday schools; yet, since all really sound principles are capable of adaptation to varied circumstances, it is one of the most important duties of a training class so to study the general laws of the science of education as to exhibit their bearing on the particular work which has to be done in Sunday schools, and the particular agency by which that work is generally accomplished.

III. Model lessons by the best teachers, and lessons under observation and criticism by all the members of the class in turn, are very valuable expedients when well managed; but their value entirely depends on the manner in which they are conducted. A complete series of such lessons will comprise lessons to infants, to large classes, to small ones, and to elder scholars, some founded on a reading lesson, others on an address. Each different form in which a lesson might be given in a Sunday school should be taken in succession; the chief attention, of course, being given to that form which best represents the average duty of the majority of the members. Even in criticizing such lessons it is always desirable to proceed on a system. Vague impressions about the success or failure of the teaching serve no useful purpose. They may, perhaps, give pain, and yet nothing is to be learnt from hearing them recounted. It is found that all really valuable criticism consists of *details;* the enumeration of

Model lessons.

special faults and excellencies, and comments thereupon. Generally it is worth while to keep in view certain heads of observation under which to arrange the critical estimate of a lesson.

The following are perhaps the most important: (*a*) *Subject*—its selection, its value, its quantity, its adaptation to the age and standing of the children; (*b*) *Language*—its simplicity, its clearness, its correctness and force; (*c*) *Arrangement*—the introduction of the subject, its division into parts, the order in which its facts and lessons are evolved, and their due connection and subordination; (*d*) *Method*—the style of the questioning, the use of ellipses, and the general skill with which the knowledge is imparted; (*e*) *Manner*—the tone, the spirit, the energy, the life, the kindness of the teacher, the attractiveness of the lesson, and the moral force which accompanied it; (*f*) *Illustration*—its appropriateness, whether oral or pictorial, its power to strike the attention, and the skill with which it is used; (*g*) *Discipline*—the order of the class, the interest and attention evinced by the children, the control exercised by the teacher over the *entire* body of learners, and the means by which that control is secured; (*h*) *Results*—Has the lesson really fulfilled its purpose? Will it be carried away and remembered? How much of it could be reproduced by the children to-morrow, and by what proportion of the class? Under this last head criticism will necessarily be conjectural, and therefore cautious; but an attempt may very fairly be made to estimate the probable value of a lesson as a whole, after it has been examined in detail. Special circumstances will occasionally

Points to criticize.

suggest new heads of criticism, and Christian courtesy will always modify its form; but great advantage is found to arise from that systematic investigation of a lesson which arranges faults and merits under specific heads, and which does not depend in any way upon general impressions.

IV. Periodical opportunities should be afforded by the class for the statement of practical difficulties, and for asking questions relating to the best mode of dealing with special cases. Such opportunities will prove especially valuable to young teachers, who often meet with perplexities of a kind which are not anticipated in lectures, or solved even by the most systematic course of lessons. If the questions are committed to writing, classified, and, after due notice has been given, discussed in unrestrained conversation, even the youngest and most timid teachers will feel at liberty to share in the exercise, and will be able to contribute some useful material to the common stock.

Discuss practical difficulties.

V. It is a great advantage to a training class to possess one member whose age, experience, judgment, and practical knowledge of teaching qualify him to act as moderator at the criticism lessons, and to take the general oversight of the proceedings of the class. If the same person periodically inspected the schools of the district, observed the teaching of each member of the training class, noticed its weak points, and followed up his visits by such private counsel and guidance as each teacher seemed most to need, the results of the class training would soon be found to tell on the teaching of the schools. A rare union

A good leader essential.

of Christian gentleness and kindness, with knowledge of methods and practical good sense, is needed for the right performance of this delicate task; but unless some attempt is made to connect the week evening training with the Sunday work, and to secure that what is gained by the one is made actually available in the other, the class will fail to realize all the good which it is calculated to achieve.

This little essay will have failed in its purpose if it does not leave upon the mind of its reader the impression that good teaching is not an *easy* thing. The way to the understanding and conscience of a child is not readily found. To find it is to solve a great problem, and to make use of this discovery so as to inculcate Christian truth is to solve a greater still. But none can hope to do this who do not thoroughly comprehend, first, the nature of the truth they wish to teach; secondly, the nature of the being who is to receive it; and thirdly, the means by which the one is to be communicated to the other. And to comprehend all this demands serious study and thought. He who looks upon Sunday school teaching as a relaxation merely, or as a cheap form of Christian benevolence, will gain no real success in it. That success is reserved for those who regard the work as one involving solemn responsibilities, who devote to it the best powers and faculties they possess, and who seek to improve their natural gifts by diligent culture, and by studying the rules of teaching as a science and as an art.

Good teaching demands study.

For, after all, it must be remembered that the

preparation afforded by a training class is a supplement to other preparation, and not a substitute for it. Union with such a class may prove a great privilege to a teacher; but if it diminishes his own sense of individual responsibility, if it causes him to relax in his own personal efforts and private studies, or if it lowers his estimate of the work and makes him satisfied with mere routine, it will be a snare to him. The class can only deal with instruments. It cannot give power. The true power of a teacher lies in the force of his own character, in the depth of his convictions, and in the consistency of a life which is regulated on Christian principles and radiant with the light of the Spirit of God. The highest religious teaching is that by which the knowledge, the experience, the faith and the devotion of the teacher become so attractive to the learner that he longs to appropriate them to himself. Children are always more willing to receive religious knowledge when they see that it has done something to beautify the character, to ennoble the motives, and to discipline the life of him who undertakes to impart it. They will be prepared to love what they see to be lovely. None, therefore, but a devout and earnest Christian can ever be a successful teacher of the Bible. Such a teacher will always be the most anxious to avail himself of the aid which methods, mechanism, and professional rules can give; for he alone will know how to use them.

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